

Who does God want leading His Church?, pt. 1

Pastoral Leadership

November 22, 2009

We have just finished studying the great epistle to the Romans

- It took us almost 2 years to teach through this book

We are coming up on a holiday season

- I didn't want to start a new book study just yet

We will begin our study of Exodus in January

- I am really excited to pick up where we left off in Genesis 2 years ago

You should see a pattern developing with my Sunday AM teaching schedule

- I would like to teach through the Torah – the first five books of the Old Testament
- But I also enjoy teaching the books of the NT

So unless the Lord changes my mind, my goal is to flip-flop between the OT and NT

- Genesis, then Romans
- Exodus, then Matthew
- Leviticus, then ???

Yes, after Exodus, I want to tackle a Gospel

- Studying the words and life of Jesus Christ should be a great desire on our hearts

As I said a few weeks ago during our annual meeting, I have no desire to leave CBC

- The Lord willing, if you allow me, I would be quite content to continue my ministry here at CBC for the long-term

Six years ago, I taught an overview of Biblical Eldership during the Sunday AM service

- I would like to repeat that series over the next few weeks

There are six Sundays left in 2009

- I will preach a 5-part series on Biblical Eldership
- Inserted in between the 4th and 5th parts to this series will be a special Christmas message

I know that some of you will be traveling over the next few weeks

- But could I ask that if you plan on being absent during a part of this series, that you would listen to the message online?

This issue of Biblical Eldership is so important

- It is imperative that every person here at CBC understand what an elder is, what he is expected to do, and what your responsibilities are

The title of this series is, “Who does God want leading His Church?”

- Notice the question is not, “Who do we want leading the Church?”

We are going to study this topic of Biblical Eldership using the following headings:¹

- **Pastoral leadership**
 - What are the roles and responsibilities of elders?
 - We will be addressing this topic today
- **Shared leadership**
 - Does the NT require more than one elder to guide the church?
 - Does the senior pastor have more say or votes than the other elders?
- **Male leadership**
 - Can women serve as elders of a local church?
 - What positions of leadership, if any, can women serve?
- **Qualified leadership**
 - What does it take to be an elder?
 - Who makes the rules anyway?
 - Where should the focus be: character or abilities or both?
- **Servant leadership**
 - Are the elders merely decision-makers, or do they have other functions?
 - Since the elders should pattern themselves after Jesus Christ, what was His style of leadership?
 - Why is it important to serve the people?

I am very much indebted to Alexander Strauch, who is the human instrument behind the writing of his book, Biblical Eldership

- This is, to my knowledge, the most in-depth and insightful book on this topic

Let's consider some common misconceptions of what an elder is

- Policymaker
- Financial officer
- Fund raiser
- Administrator

But the Bible paints the elder in a different light

- Shepherd – watching over the flock of God
- Overseer – looking and leading the church of God
- Pastor – gently taking care of people's needs
- Teacher – feeding the believers a steady diet of God's Word

Even the names that we often give to elders conveys wrong impressions

- **Referring to the elders as a "board"** – this causes people to view elders are merely administrators and decision-makers
- **Referring to them as ministers** – this confuses the fact that every believer is a minister of the local church
- **Referring to them as bishops** – this brings up thoughts of power and abuse

¹ Much of this sermon's outline and flow is taken directly from Alexander Strauch's book, *Biblical Eldership*. Where there are direct quotations, I cite the page number.

- **Referring to them as overseers** – this word is not used often in our culture, so it is confusing and misleading
- **Referring to them as shepherds** – this term often brings up thoughts of physical animals being led by a shepherd boy

Whatever terminology we use, we need to understand the basis for what an elder is

- Our words have meaning

This morning, I want to discuss a few roles and responsibilities that the elders have in relation to the local church

- **Let's study four (4) responsibilities of the shepherd elder**

I. Protect the flock

Throughout the NT, an essential function of an elder is that of protecting the church from false doctrine

- Acts 20:17, “**And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church**”
- Acts 20:28-31a, “**Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears”**”

Paul urged the elders to heed several commands

- Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock (20:28)
 - o Notice that the first place they should guard is their own lives!
 - o They should also guard the flock of God
- Shepherd the flock of God (20:28b)
- Be on the alert (20:31)
 - o Laziness will not be tolerated or accepted!

Paul knew that savage wolves would come in “**among your own selves...men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them**” (20:30)

- The false teachers were affecting the church from within!!!

Among the qualifications of an elder is that of knowing Scripture well enough to be able to refute false teachers

- Titus 1:5, 6, 9, “**For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man be above reproach...9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.**” (emphasis mine)

Shepherds should also be willing to seek lost, straying sheep

- By nature, sheep are defenseless – they have no method or means of defense
 - o Many times, they simply stand still while a wolf or bear tears them to pieces

Paul knew the analogy of shepherd and sheep was applicable to the church of God

- Just like the wolves, bears, and wild animals attacked the sheep, so false teachers would come in and attack the immature believers

It was imperative for a shepherd to be alert

- The natural tendency of a shepherd elder is to grow lazy, inattentive and prayerless

He was to know the predator very well

- There is a constant need on the behalf of elders to stay updated of the latest theological trends, so that we can protect the people from false teaching

It took courage to protect a physical flock

- King David demonstrated this type of mentality when he stood before Saul and said, “**The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine**” (1 Sam 17:37)

It takes courage to perform many elements of being an elder

- *To discipline sin in the church*
- *To confront internal strife*
- *To stand up to powerful teachers who teach false doctrine*

This all needs to be with courage, and with compassion

Because of the make-up of any local church is varied, the elders serve as a wall of protection for the people

- John 10:11-13, “**I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 “He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. 13 “He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep.”**

One vital area of the ministry of an elder is that of protecting the flock...

- ***But there are more responsibilities***

II. Feed the flock

Essential to being a shepherd is the ability to teach the flock of God

- This is an imperative part of being an elder

Jesus Christ was first and foremost a Teacher

- All who desire to be Christ-like in their ministry will see a similar pattern

Jesus told Peter, “**Feed My sheep**” (John 21:17)

- This was a primary part of his responsibility

The early church was based on apostolic teaching

- Eph 2:20 says that the very foundation of the Church is the teaching of the apostles and prophets
- Acts 2:42, “**And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**”
- Paul encouraged Timothy, “**Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.***” (1 Tim 4:13)

It is required of all elders that they be able to teach

- 1 Tim 3:2, “able to teach”
- Titus 1:9, “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”

Among the elders, however, there are those who are committed to full-time vocational ministry

- 1 Tim 5:17, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching”

These elders are often referred to as “pastors”

- Their giftedness lies in the area of leadership, teaching, and preaching
- Since they make their living off of the Gospel, they should receive financial compensation for doing so
- 1 Cor 9:14, “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”

But all elders are called pastors

- We will see this throughout our study of this topic

Teaching the Word is central to any local church

- It is through the Word that the elders
 - o Protect
 - o Guide
 - o Lead
 - o Nourish
 - o Comfort
 - o Educate

Thus, it is imperative that any prospective elder have a good handle on the Word of God and how to use it in a variety of contexts

It is precisely this area of teaching that separates the elder from the deacon

- Many of the same character qualities are the same
- However, the mandate of teaching is absent in the area of deacons

Elders can lack giftedness in certain areas (administration, evangelism, etc.)

- However, they are required to be teachers of the Word

An elder who doesn't know how to use the Word of God is like a doctor who doesn't know how to use a scalpel!

We have seen that elders need to be able to

- **Protect the flock**
- **Feed the flock**

III. Lead the flock

One of the terms used in the NT for elder is the word “overseer”

- It literally means “to give leadership over,” “to manage,” or “to direct”
- It can refer to general oversight of the entire ministry OR it can refer to specific oversight in a particular ministry

When someone refers to another as a “leader,” the assumption is that the person is capable of leading...

All elders should be recognized as leaders and managers

- The Church of God is referred to as a stewardship
- Elders, then are “**God’s stewards**” (Titus 1:7)

This is not the elders’ church!

- This isn’t my church!
- I did not die for CBC!

This is the Lord’s church that He bought with His own blood

- We are merely stewards of the resources here

Peter exhorted the elders of his day, “**Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness**” (1 Pet 5:1-2)

- In the same verse, Peter links those who
 - o Shepherds
 - o With those who give oversight

“Sheep are not independent travelers. They must have a human conductor. They cannot go to predetermined places by themselves. They have, apparently, no sense of direction. The greenest pasture may be only a few miles away, but the sheep left to themselves cannot find it. Where the shepherd leads, the sheep will go. He knows that the shepherd is a guide and that it is safe to follow him”²

A congregation needs from the elders...

- Leadership
- Management
- Governance
- Guidance
- Counsel
- Vision

The elders must...

- Set goals
- Make decisions
- Give direction
- Correct failures
- Affect change
- Motivate people

It is important that elders know people

- Know how sensitive people are
- Know their hurts, needs, troubles, weaknesses, and sins
- Know how stubborn we can all be
- Know how to deal with people on a regular basis

² Strauch, 25-26

I have heard it said, “Ministry would be a lot easier without the people!”

- Yet, people are the very essence and heart of ministry!

Scripture even provides a “testing ground” for all potential elders...*the home*

- 1 Tim 3:4-5, “*He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)*”

If a man is not a good leader, manager, steward, and overseer of his own family, how does he expect to be able to shepherd the flock of God?

- Lk 16:10, “*He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.*”

Home life will either qualify or disqualify you for ministry within a local church!

D.L. Moody said it like this, “If I wanted to find out whether a man was a Christian, I wouldn’t ask his minister. I would go and ask his wife. If a man doesn’t treat his wife right, I don’t want to hear him talk about Christianity. What is the use of his talking about salvation for the next life if he has no salvation for this?”³

It takes a lot of hard work and time in order to shepherd the flock of God

- It takes qualified men who are servants of Christ and His Church, who are willing to spend and be expended for the glory of God

Spurgeon used to tell young pastors, “You can grow weary in the work, but never grow weary of the work.”

When viewed as simply a board where decisions are made, many volunteers may desire the office of elder

- However, when viewed as demanding pastoral work, few will rush to sign-up!

Spiritual laziness cannot characterize those who aspire to the office of elder

- Those elders who are not financially supported by the church have to balance home, work, and ministry
- It takes a great deal of self-sacrifice in order to serve

But so many people spend hours upon hours every week in social events, sports, and community affairs

- It is a matter of priorities

“We Bible-believing Christians are becoming a lazy, soft, pay-for-it-to-be-done group of Christians. It is positively amazing how much people can accomplish when they are motivated to work for something they love.”⁴

Elders have been seen to

- **Protect the flock**
- **Feed the flock**
- **Lead the flock**

³ The Christian Husband, 11

⁴ Strauch, 28

IV. Care for the flock

Aside from all of the decisions that need to be made, oversight to be exercised, etc., there lies another responsibility

- Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders, “**In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35, emphasis mine)**

Elders must seek to meet whatever needs the people have

- Visit the sick
- Comfort the bereaved
- Strengthen the weak
- Pray for all the sheep
- Visit new members
- Provide counsel for various circumstances (pre-marital, marital, etc.)

Elders, however, are not the only ministers of a local church

- As I have said many times in recent days, every member of a local church is a minister

We have all been given spiritual gifts to be used for the edification of the local church

- There is no way that the elders can meet the needs of each and every situation that arises

Consider these scenarios:

A woman needs counsel...

- It would be nice to have some mature ladies who can come alongside and assist in this situation
- It relieves the appearance issue related to men counseling women by themselves

Someone is hurting financially

- Instead of alerting the elders, perhaps you could buy some groceries for that family and take it to them

You see a new couple at church

- Take them out to eat or have them over to your home
- Get to know them, answer their questions

The deacons are the church’s “ministers of mercy”

- At the very heart of our deacons is a desire to serve
- They can really help to lighten the load of the elders

But not even the deacons can fulfill every act of service

- Every one of you who is a believer is called and required to serve others

The greatest need of elders today is that of love

- Love can overcome any lack of giftedness
- Love can help calm a situation
- Love is the balm that can heal brokenness and bitterness

Paul wrote this, “**For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you**” (2 Cor 2:4)

- “He is simply burning up inside to be with them, to help them, to nurture them, to feed them, to stabilize them, to establish an adequate foundation for them. Small wonder, then, that he devotes himself to praying for them when he finds he cannot visit them personally”⁵

We have seen that elders are to perform four (4) basic functions without a local church

- **Protect the sheep**
- **Feed the sheep**
- **Lead the sheep**
- **Care for the practical needs**

But there are also seven (7) distinct ways in which you, as a local church, can support your elders

I. Respect your elders

1 Thess 5:12-13, “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.”

Here are some practical applications

- Display your appreciation for those who seek to lead the local church according to the will of God
- Realize that they are human, and are prone to discouragement

Paul says plainly, “Live at peace with one another”

- This would help a lot!
- This would help to alleviate further problems with disunity and division

II. Honor your elders

1 Timothy 5:17-18, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.””

It is through your financial gifts that the ministry of this church is supported and sustained

- But financial support isn’t the only kind of honor

The Word of God commands the local church to honor all elders

- For their work
- For their time

III. Follow your elders

Hebrews 13:7, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”

- Trust the elders, who seek to model the faith
- Pray that our lives will be an example of Christ-likeness

⁵ Strauch, 31

We are imperfect models

- But we are models nonetheless

IV. Obey and submit to your elders

Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders, and submit *to them*; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

- Have you ever thought of elders as those who “watch over your souls?”

As we seek to be good stewards of the people and resources here at CBC, would you commit to obeying and submitting to us?

- I can promise you now, that there will be times that you won't be able to see the total reason for our doing certain things
- But would you be willing to trust us enough to submit in obedience nonetheless?

Make your act of submission to us an act of worship

- If you are in a proper relationship and fellowship with Christ, then submitting to His undershepherds will be much easier

Every elder will stand before the Chief Shepherd one day and give an account for how he has lead the local church

Elders must answer questions like these with a clean conscience:

- How well have you taught God's Word? Did you treat it flippantly, or did you respect it as the living, active Word of God?
- How well did you do at protecting the sheep from false teachers? Were you spiritually alert to the onslaught of Satan's schemes?
- Did you care for the weak, or did you think that was beneath you?
- Did you love the people?
- Did you pray for the people on a regular basis?

V. Guard the reputation of your elders

Protect the elders from false accusations

- 1 Cor 13:7, “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”

When you hear something about one of us, would you be willing to think the best, instead of the worst?

When you hear rumors and gossip regarding us, would you be faithful to obey Scripture?

- Don't listen to gossip...refuse to listen
- Send the person back to the one to whom they have issues!
 - o Mt 18 – go to your brother!

VI. Support your elders

Give feedback regarding how well elders and deacons are doing

- If we are doing a good job, let us know!

There have been numerous letters, cards, and emails of encouragement since I have been here

- I thank you for that

Before you complain about what the elders and deacons are doing, make sure that you have a proper motivation

- You may know very little of the background behind most decisions
- So ask before you accuse

When you disagree with our decisions, realize that we are making the best decision that we can, in light of the information that we have been given

- Pray for us

VII. Pray for your elders

Paul asked the young church at Thessalonica, “Brethren, pray for us” (1 Thess 5:25)

- So I ask you to pray for those of us in leadership

Pray for

- Our families – we all put in long hours in ministry
- Our relationship with Christ – sometime with so much output, there is not much input
- Unity – that we would move forward as a team
- Wisdom – to be wise beyond our age, experience, and training

I have given you a list of responsibilities this morning

- Responsibilities of elders toward the church
- Responsibilities of the church toward the elders

We will continue to study this area of Biblical Eldership over the next few weeks

- I trust that you will be with us
- To learn more about what the Bible teaches on this important topic of Biblical Eldership