

This last Wednesday at our congregational meeting—Mr Dan Detwiler was formally nominated to the office of elder, and as I then said, in keeping with our constitution—it's my intention for the next few weeks to preach a topical series on the subject of the eldership—this first message will address various miscellaneous items—that need addressing but not in individual sermons—thus I've entitled this message—Elders: An Introduction—wherein I want to address five introductory issues...

- I. Their Roots
- II. Their Origin
- III. Their Names
- IV. Their Number
- V. Their Example

#### I. Their Roots

1. Here I want to suggest the office of shepherd-elder has three OT roots—[1] OT shepherd-leaders, [2] OT elders, [3] OT promises...
2. Now—before I briefly examine these—let me remind you—most NT realities have new and old aspects to them...
3. That is—most things associated with the NC are new, and yet, have roots in the OT—i.e. baptism and Lord's Supper...
4. Thus—the office of elder is a new thing—it's one of the two offices established by Christ in the new covenant...
5. Yet—while the office of elder or pastor is a distinctly NC reality—it has shadows and roots in the old covenant...
6. [1] OT shepherd-leaders—that is—there are within the OT certain men who were both shepherds and leaders...
7. Now—the imagery of a shepherd-leader has its origin in God—who lead Israel as a shepherd leads his sheep...
8. Thus—it should not surprise us—when the Lord raises up men to lead His people—He uses the imagery of shepherds...
9. Perhaps the two most obvious examples would be Moses and David—both of which were shepherds called to shepherd...
10. Ps.78:70-71—"He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance..."
11. [2] OT elders—that is—within the history of Israel—the Lord set aside 70 men as elders to shepherd the nation...
12. Num.11:16—"So the LORD said to Moses: Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you..."
13. Moses is told to gather seventy men "of the elders"—that is, there were already those called elders within Israel...
14. From their stay in Egypt, the Israelites multiplied, and certain men began to oversee various clans or tribes...
15. The Hebrew word rendered "elder" literally means "aged" and refers to those of greater age and thus wisdom...
16. Here—the Lord chose 70 out from a larger group of elders—to assist Moses in shepherding the nation of Israel...
17. [3] OT promises—throughout the OT the Lord promised to provide shepherds to govern His new covenant people...
18. Jer.23:1-6—"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the LORD. 2 Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of

your doings," says the LORD. 3 "But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. 4 "I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the LORD. 5 " Behold, *the* days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 6 In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this *is* His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS..."

## II. Their Origin

1. That is—elders are the express gifts of the ascended and glorified Christ—to His beloved and very needy bride...
2. Eph.4:7-8—"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men..."
3. Eph.4:11-12—"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..."
4. [1] Who gave gifts, v1—"He Himself gave"—that is—the giver of the gifts is the ascended and exalted Christ...
5. This point is both very beautiful and instructive—the victorious and glorious Savior gave gifts to His church...
6. Now—we learned this morning that the first gift Christ gave was His Spirit—who in-tern gives gifts to men...
7. Thus—there is a sense in which we could refer to this gifts as blood-bought—purchased by His atoning death...
8. [2] What gifts He gave, v11—"He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastor-teachers..."
9. The best commentators agree—that Paul describes four not five gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers...
10. In other words—pastor and teacher are one office—they are pastor-teachers—that is—pastors who teach truth...
11. Now—historically protestant Christians have understood that the first three of these offices were temporary...
12. That is—there are no longer apostles, prophets, and evangelists—this is more clear with regards to the first two...
13. He gave some gifts through which He would give His Scripture—and He gave other gifts to teach that word...
14. The apostle Paul uses the phrase—"apostles and prophets" two other times within his letter to the Ephesians...
15. Eph.2:19-20—"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone..."
16. Eph.3:5—"which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets..."
17. In both of these texts—"apostles and prophets" refer to those unique gifts through which Scripture was given...
18. While it's uncertain—it appears that the gift of "evangelists" was likely a temporary assistant to the apostles...
19. But for certain—pastor—teachers is a gift that's given today—and consists of men who feed the flock with the word...
20. [3] Why He gave gifts, v12—"for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..."
21. There's been a measure of discussion over this verse—whether or not there's two or three purposes provided...

22. The traditional view sees three—[a] for the equipping of the saints, [b] for the work of ministry, [c] for the edifying of the body...
23. Pastor-teaches are given for the purpose of building up the church—of strengthening every member by the word...

### III. Their Names

1. Through the NT—it becomes very clear—that there are only two offices, with two officers—elder and deacon...
2. Yet—as we read through out NT—it also becomes very clear—that elders are also called by various names...
3. Acts 20:17—"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them..."
4. Acts 20:28—"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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..."
5. 1Pet.5:1-2—"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly..."
6. [1] Elder—this Greek word simply means—"aged" and it could simply be applied to those of advanced age...
7. Normally, with old-age comes wisdom—thus—the NT applies this term to officers who have unique wisdom...
8. Barnes—"The word 'elder' means, properly, 'one who is old;' but it is frequently used in the New Testament as applicable to the officers of the church; probably because aged persons were at first commonly appointed to these offices..."
9. Thus primarily—the title elder underscores their unique wisdom and thus ability to rule with Christ's church...
10. [2] Shepherd—this Greek word means—"to feed or tend sheep"—thus, to perform the functions of a shepherd...
11. Specifically—this title refers to their work of feeding the sheep with the word—which is absolutely central to this office...
12. Now—it may surprise some to know—that the noun "Pastor" is only used once in the NT to describe this office...
13. Eph.4:11—"He gave some as pastor-teachers"—that is—pastors who shepherd or tend the sheep by teaching...
14. Every other time—the NT uses the verb form of this word to describe the men who fulfill the office of elder...
15. [3] Overseer—this Greek word means—"to look after, inspect, or care for"—elders are to "oversee" the church...
16. Paul uses the noun form of this word in 1Tim.3:1,2 and Tit.1:7—to refer to the office of overseer or bishop...
17. Thus—if we were to put these three words together we find—elders rule, they shepherd, and they oversee the flock...
18. F.F. Bruce—"There was in apostolic times no distinction between elders (presbyters) and bishops such as we find from the second century onwards; the leaders of the Ephesian church are indiscriminately described as elders, bishops, and shepherds..."

### IV. Their Number

1. Here—I want to answer to questions—How many elders should each church have, and—How should those elders interact with each other...
2. Well—I suggest that both of these questions can be answered if we keep in mind three words—plurality, equality, and diversity...

3. [1] Plurality—that is—it is the will of Christ, that normally speaking—each church should have at least two elders...
4. Ti.1:5—"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you..."
5. Acts 14:21-23—"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. 23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed..."
6. [2] Equality—that is—there is within the eldership—an equality of rank and authority among each of the elders...
7. Now proof for this assertion is based upon the fact—that Scriptures simply describe two offices and officers...
8. In other words—the Scriptures do not support the idea—of senior and junior pastors—or pastors and elders...
9. Every elder is a pastor and every pastor an elder—or, it's the responsibility of all elders to shepherd and oversee the flock...
10. John Murray—"There is not the slightest evidence in the New Testament that among the elders there was any hierarchy; the elders exercise government in unison, and on a parity [equality] with one another..."
11. [3] Diversity—by this I mean—because there is a diversity of gift and grace—there is a diversity of function...
12. Simply put—not every elder is going to be packaged in the exact same way—all will have strengths and weaknesses...
13. Matt.25:14-15—"For *the kingdom of heaven is* like a man traveling to a far country, *who* called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. 15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey..."
14. Rom.12:3—"For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith..."
15. Rom.12:6-8—"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness..."
16. 1Tim.5:17-18—"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. 18 For the Scripture says, You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, The laborer *is* worthy of his wages..."
17. Now—before I summarize a few lessons from the collective teaching of these texts—let me say a few words about this text in particular...
18. The phrase—"the elders who rule well"—is not intended as a contrast between elders who rule well and others who rule badly...
19. The word "well" means "excellent" and refers to a heightened degree of gift and ability given to some elders...
20. Sam Waldron—"Implicit in Paul's reference to well-ruling elders is the idea that the well-ruling elders are an inner circle in a larger circle of good and qualified elders..."
21. Greg Nichols—"What is the opposite of well? not ruling poorly or inadequately, for such men would not be qualified to hold the office at all. Paul speaks in comparative terms. Though all men qualified to be elders rule with a measure of competence, some elders rule with marked proficiency. Paul refers to these..."
22. From these elders—there are some who—"labor in the word and doctrine"—that is—this is their primary vocation...
23. In other words—within the "elders that rule well"—there are some whose—"work is preaching and teaching..."
24. Thus—the distinction is not between those who rule well and those who don't—but between elders who labor full time in the word and those who don't...

25. Those who labor full time are to be—"counted worthy of double honor"—that is—respect that includes financial support...
26. 1Tim.5:3—"Honor widows who are really widows"—he then describes the qualifications of being "really" widows...
27. Those widows who have family members—should be honored by their families (v4)—which includes material needs...
28. Thus—when Paul says that certain elders are "worthy of double honor" he means—a respect that includes monetary support...
29. Thus Paul continues, v18—"For the Scripture says, You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain, and The laborer is worthy of his wages.."
30. An elder who laborers full time preaching and teaching—is worthy of double honor—or—is worthy of his wages...
31. Sam Waldron—"What does honor mean in 1Tim.5:17? My conviction is that honor here designates giving something of material value to someone as a mark of the value we attach to them and the esteem and respect in which we hold them. In this case the thing of material value is the regular, financial support of the church..."
32. Thus—by *honor* is meant "respect" that manifests itself in financial and mortuary support—the church pays them...
33. They are worthy of "double honor"—in contrast to the widows who receive honor—as they likely have greater needs...
34. [a] Not every elder will have the same degree of grace or gift—that is—there are various levels of ability within elders...
35. There can be a several elders within a single church—and each one be gifted uniquely in teaching abilities...
36. Now—obviously—every elder has to be qualified—but degrees of gift and ability are given sovereignly by God...
37. This can be proven by experience—not every man is the same—men like Luther, Calvin, and Spurgeon—were especially gifted...
38. [b] Not all elders have the same emphasis within church—that is—some work full time at preaching and teaching...
39. What Paul describes in 1Tim.5:17 are men whose vocation is preaching—"those who labor in preaching and teaching..."
40. These are vocational elders—set aside by the church—to labor in the word—this will be reflected amount of times they teach...
41. [c] Not all elders will be financially supported by the church—that is—some will remain bi-vocational elders...
42. This is the clear inference from this text—not every elder is to receive double honor—or, financial support...

## V. Their Example

1. I mentioned earlier—that shepherd-elders have their roots in the OT Scriptures and the old covenant with Israel...
2. Throughout the OT we repeatedly find—that even the best shepherds and leaders were flawed and imperfect...
3. Thus—throughout the same OT—God promises to send the ultimate Shepherd and Overseer of the sheep...
4. Ezek.34:20-24—"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. 21 "Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, 22 "therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23 "I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them -- My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 "And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken..."

5. This chapter describes the Lord's condemnation of the unfaithful shepherds—who fed themselves instead of the sheep (vv1-10)...
6. As the result—the sheep were scattered abroad—that is—they would be taken into exile by the Assyrians...
7. From v11-16—the Lord promises that He Himself will gather them, v11—"Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out..."
8. In verses 17-19 He speaks to the sheep—for although the shepherds failed them—they were not without guilt...
9. In vv20-24 He again promises to gather them Himself—this time He identified how—by sending His servant David...
10. V23—"I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. he shall feed them be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.."
11. Thus—the NT refers to Christ as the Good Shepherd—who came to seek and to save that which was lost....
12. Furthermore—the NT expressly refers to Christ as not only the Shepherd but also the Overseer of our souls...
13. 1Pet.2:25—"For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls [1Pet.5:4]...
14. Now—the fact that Christ is the ultimate Shepherd and Bishop—should be both instructing and comforting...
15. [a] Instructing—that is—our Savior's perfect example serves as inspired pattern for all ministers to follow...
16. [b] Comforting—that is—it should be a great comfort to both pastor and people that they are in good hands...
17. [1] He was qualified—that is—He was sent and equipped by God—He came conscious of His divine call...
18. [2] He was compassionate—that is—His heart was large for the needy—for those within and without the church...
19. Matt.9:36—"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd..."
20. [3] He was diligent—that is—He was diligent to teach, preach, pray, minister, and disciple—His beloved flock...
21. 2Tim.2:15—"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth..."
22. [4] He was patient—that is—toward his slow learning disciples—He patiently bore with their remaining unbelief...
23. 2Tim.2:24—"And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth..."
24. [5] He was sanctified—that is—He was set apart from the world—and devoted to love and serve His Father...