

The Responsibilities Of Elders

Introduction. When one studies the qualifications of elders, they are impressed with the kind of man God needs to oversee His church. In the same way, the responsibilities of the elders are so grave that it requires the very strongest of Christian men to fill the office. No man who does not understand the nature of these responsibilities should be placed in that office. Much of the weakness in the church today can be traced to the inefficiency of the elders in performing their duties. On the other hand, strong churches can likely look to the quality of men they have leading them.

The responsibility of elders is continual in the congregation over which they rule. The "office" of an elder is a good work. It requires much time and serious thought, as well as a great love for the cause of Christ. These duties cannot be taken lightly, as some have done, but they must be taken with the same seriousness that all other commands of Christ are taken. Looking at these responsibilities will help us in selecting men for this work.

I. ***Take Heed To Themselves (Acts 20:28)***

- A. An elder must constantly examine his own life in light of God's word (1 Timothy 4:16; James 1:22-25).
 - 1. No elder is immune to temptation. He must be careful that his life does not bring reproach on the cause of Christ.
 - 2. He must "take time" to be holy. Spiritual development requires prayer and meditation on God's word (Psalm 1:2-3; Philippians 4:8; 2 Timothy 2:15). He must continue to grow, even as others (Acts 20:32).
 - 3. He must examine himself to see if he is in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).
 - 4. He must examine himself to see if he is doing the work of an overseer. There are those who cease to do the work, and thereby hurt the Lord's church.
- B. It is certainly dangerous for the church when an elder fails to see his own faults and weaknesses. A lot of error and division can occur from elders who fail to measure themselves against the perfect standard (2 Corinthians 10:12).

II. ***Take Heed To The Flock (Acts 20:28)***

- A. The relationship of a shepherd to his flock is a beautiful picture of the relationship of the elders to the church. But a woe was spoken through Jeremiah upon those shepherds who scattered and destroyed the sheep (Jeremiah 23:1-4).

- B. It is not enough for the elder to look out for his own conduct. Taking heed to the flock implies that he must constantly watch the flock. This requires a skillful eye to detect the slightest danger that might come upon any member.
- C. He must watch for dangers of false doctrines. He must watch for the onset of weakness and spiritual decline. Jesus showed an interest in one sheep that strayed, and so it must be with the elders. He must be able to detect the slightest loss of interest and yielding to temptation. He must also watch for quarrelings and divisions among the members. In short, he must watch the conduct of the whole flock to be sure that they all obey God in all their relations.

III. **Feed The Flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2)**

- A. The idea of "feeding the flock of God" is the same as to "pastor" them. Many elders seem to think that this only calls for assembling the flock two or three times a week and give them a regular supply of spiritual food (Hebrews 5:12-14).
- B. But elders must make sure that each member is fed well. The only food is the word of God. In classes, the elders must supply good teachers, proper equipment for teaching, good scriptural literature, a good system of study, and proper personal teaching. Any child not fed will soon perish (1 Peter 2:2).

IV. **Watch For Grievous Wolves (Acts 20:29-30)**

- A. An elder who is not watchful is playing right into the hands of the devil. To watch for grievous wolves means to watch for people claiming to be teachers of God, who, in reality, are teachers of evil doctrines.
- B. Every elder must be extremely cautious for the flock against any innovation coming into the church by ungodly men who tries to push it upon the members. The elders must mark and avoid these false teachers (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10-11; 1 John 4:1).

V. **Be Guided By The Word Of God (Acts 20:32; Titus 1:9)**

- A. His duty is to be careful not to be led by his own personal opinions. The elder must not be governed by the "whims" of worldly men, or the doctrines of their own theories, but by the New Testament only. Gullible men do not qualify as elders.
- B. An elder must know the doctrinal needs of the church. He must see that the flock is protected from error such as philosophies of world (evolution, humanism, etc.), religious error, and error from within the church. He must take a stand against all sin.

VI. *Support The Weak (Acts 20:35)*

- A. This specific duty has reference to caring for the poor, and it requires the elders to labor with their hands that they might be able to "help the weak." We know that God is able to provide for His own, and He promised to do so, but He does so through human agency, not miracles(Matthew 6:33). One of His ways of doing this is through the eldership.
- B. The elders should lead the congregation in looking after the necessities of the poor and needy, and supplying that need. It is never a disgrace to labor with the hands for those who cannot provide for themselves.

VII. *Decide Differences In The Church (Acts 15:6)*

- A. Frequently, differences in matters of opinion and matters of faith arise between members of a congregation. This condition cannot be ignored because it often gets larger and more serious as it progresses (1 Corinthians 6:5).
- B. Just about every qualification the elder must have must be used in this duty. Elders must exercise great care in not acting with partiality or prejudice in settling the disturbance (James 2:1).

VIII. *Take The Oversight (1 Peter 5:2)*

- A. "Taking" the oversight does not imply that it is to be done by force. The term simply means that the elder must accept the responsibilities of his charge. The term "overseer" implies that he is to superintend or look over all phases of the work of the church.
- B. Some think that "lording it over the flock" means that the elders are not to exercise any authority in discipline that does not agree with majority rule. But the Lord's church is not set up to be ruled by the majority. An elder cannot go beyond the authority of Christ, nor can they legislate the liberty each Christian has in Christ.

IX. *Be Examples To The Flock (1 Peter 5:3)*

- A. An elder cannot "lord" their will over the church as a "boss," but he must lead the way for the others to follow. Instead of giving strict commands to others in trying to drive them to service, he must set the example and beckon the others to follow.
- B. An elder should be an example as a father, husband, neighbor, businessman, peacemaker, and teacher. He should be an example in faithfulness to the Lord's church and as a worker in the kingdom.
- C. Elders "lord" over the flock when they give commands and restrictions without due respect to the congregation and the Bible -- when they make laws that are not in harmony with the Bible or for the welfare of the congregation.

X. ***Admonish The Church (1 Thessalonians 5:12)***

- A. An essential duty of the elders is to teach and admonish church members to observe all that Jesus has commanded them (Matthew 28:20). This admonition must be given in the spirit of love and based upon a continual observation of the whole congregation.
- B. Elders can and should admonish the flock by living righteously, by instruction to each member, and by the selection of sound teachers and preachers to publicly instruct. Trouble often arises when elders are not aware of what is being taught. The church is in continual need of gentle but firm admonition to prevent straying from the truth.

XI. ***Rule Well (1 Timothy 5:17)***

- A. There is a difference in ruling and ruling well. In order to rule well the elders must observe certain rules and restrictions given in the New Testament. Again, an elder must rule without partiality, and they must rule from a negative and a positive standpoint.
- B. Some contend that elders rule only by example. If so, all Christians are rulers for they all must be good examples (Matthew 5:16). Ruling by example is just one characteristic of the elder's rule.

XII. ***Stop The Mouths Of Vain Talkers (Titus 1:11)***

- A. The elders must discipline the unruly in a firm manner. This calls for admonishing, rebuking, reproof, correcting, chastening, and encouraging without respect to persons. Elders must be governed by the word of God and not by the doctrines of men in determining the deceivers.
- B. However, in every congregation of any size there are some who will not respond to the sound teaching of the gospel. Such members must be dealt with in a very stern and scriptural manner. By continually watching for deception and remembering their charge, elders can keep the church clean and pure (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

XIII. ***Watch For The Souls Of The Church (Hebrews 13:17)***

- A. One of the greatest duties ever delivered to mortal man is that of watching after the souls of others. They must so love the flock that they, like the Master, would lay down their lives, if necessary, to protect them (John 10:11). The soul of man is his most prized possession (Matthew 16:26).
- B. To think of having to give an account of all the souls in the congregation over which he rules is the most serious thought one could have. It is little wonder that God wanted the strongest men in the church to be the overseers of His flock.

XIV. **Care For The Sick (James 5:14)**

- A. An elder must be concerned with the needs of the sick. Every elder must be a righteous man; therefore, his prayers will have great power. No one can do this duty for them.
- B. "Anointing with oil" was commonly used as medication in the days of the New Testament. As the elders pray for the recovery of the sick, they are to administer what is necessary for their recovery.

Conclusion. When the elders face the judgment seat of Christ, they must give an account of their stewardship. Can you imagine a greater responsibility? The elders are in more danger of condemnation than any other child of God because of the great responsibility of the souls they must watch after in addition to their own. This is no little job and no little man can do it. The congregation must use the utmost seriousness in selecting men for this momentous task.