

The Responsibilities Of Elders

Introduction. God's cause needs good leaders. The work is too important to leave to chance. The challenges that today's church faces are staggering, and 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 constant in the congregation. The position or office of an elder is a good or noble work (1 Timothy 3:1). It requires incredible time and serious thought, as well as a great love for God's cause.

If you were to look on Amazon, there would be tens of thousands of titles under the topic of "Christian Leadership." No doubt, most of the titles would have something beneficial in them. But the New Testament details what God expects from the men who rule over His flock. Examining these responsibilities will help elders be more committed to their task and the congregation be more informed in selecting men for the 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 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 elders to the church. But a woe was spoken through Jeremiah on 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 constantly watches the flock. This requires a skillful eye to detect the slightest danger that might come to any member.
- C. He watches for dangers of false doctrines. He watches 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 also watches for quarrelings and divisions among the members. In short, he watches the conduct of the whole flock to be sure that they all obey God in all facets of their lives.

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 “pastoring” them. Many elders seem to think that this only calls for assembling the flock two or three times a week and regularly giving them spiritual food (Hebrews 5:12-14).
- B. But elders make sure that each member is fed well. The only food is the word of God. In classes, the elders 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 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 is to be extremely cautious for the flock against any innovation coming into the church by ungodly men who try to influence the members to believe it. The elders are commanded to 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 not be led by his own personal opinions. The elder is not 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 knows the doctrinal needs of the church. He sees that the flock is protected from error such as philosophies of world (evolution, humanism, etc.), religious error, and error from within the church. He takes a stand against all sin.

VI. Support The Weak (Acts 20:35)

- A. This specific duty refers 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 lead the congregation in looking after the necessities of the poor and needy, and supplying their needs. 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 time goes on (1 Corinthians 6:5).
- B. Just about every qualification the elder has must be used in this duty. Elders 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 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 leads the way for the others to follow. Instead of giving strict commands to others in trying to drive them to service, he sets the example and beckons the others to follow.
- B. An elder should be an example as a father, husband, neighbor, community member, peacemaker, and teacher. He should be an example in faithfulness to the congregation 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 elders is to teach and admonish church members to observe all that Jesus has commanded them (Matthew 28:20). This admonition is given in the spirit of love and based on a continual observation of the whole church.
- B. Elders can and should admonish the flock by living righteously, by instructing each member, and by selecting sound teachers and preachers to publicly instruct. Trouble 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. To rule well, elders observe certain rules and restrictions given in the New Testament. Again, an elder oversees without partiality, and they rule from a negative and positive perspective.
- 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 discipline the unruly in a firm manner. This calls for admonishing, rebuking, reproof, correcting, chastening, and encouraging without respect to persons. Elders are 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 are 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 mankind 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 is concerned with the needs of the sick. Every elder is 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 whatever is necessary for their recovery.

Conclusion. When the elders face the judgment seat of Christ, they will 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 watch after in addition to their own. This is no little job and no little man can do it. The congregation uses the utmost seriousness in selecting men for this momentous task.