

Biblical Leadership (Written by Anthony Brooks)

The role of the elder in a church leadership context is unique to that of other members of the congregation; however, certain aspects of caring for one another ought to be shared amongst the entire body of believers in order to more effectively care for the souls of the members of the congregation.

While the qualifications are extremely important to ensure the men selected for the office are capable and effective at leading and shepherding God's church, the instructions given in scripture to elders are also useful for all members of the congregation when it comes to loving one another. The shepherds should be able to effectively help the flock bear their burdens, so they do not have to face these difficulties alone, but in addition to bearing these burdens, they are also to equip others to do so (Ephesians 4:12).

QUESTION: Among the body, what are some ways we can help bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

In the above question, likely one of the answers included a description of the interactions at the men's and women's bible studies at Grace Reformed Church. There is an example set in scripture from these types of interactions, which flow from the model of leadership of the church. In Acts chapter 20, when Paul is addressing the elders in the church in Ephesus, prior to the instruction given as he departs, he urges them on in humble service, using his own experience in that church as a guide:

*"You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia,
19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews;
20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house,
21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.^[c]
22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by^[d] the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there,
23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.
24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

In many of Paul's writings, he makes it a point to encourage the reader in humility by highlighting the fact that he, himself, is simply a sinner in great need of, and saved by, the grace of Jesus Christ. In this particular passage, we see it not through Paul's own writing, but through the eyes of the author of Acts, as he recounts and interaction between Paul and the elders in the church at Ephesus.

- He speaks of his role as a humble servant (20:19)
- Concerning what is taught in the church, he shows them the central point of all his ministry (20:20-21, 24)
- By his example, he leaves an encouragement to boldly proclaim Christ through faith, not so he can avoid trials but in order to joyfully endure them as the gospel is proclaimed. (20:22-23)

True Paul is speaking to a group of elders in this section of scripture, but regardless of one's role in the church, whether it be in leadership or as a congregant, these principles apply as we walk together as one church body. Pride not only affects those in leadership but can and often does manifest itself in congregational members. Whether it be because of status in life outside of the church, or perceived importance inside the local body, this can create cliques and divisions within the church that are detrimental to the ultimate goal of unity within the body.

Paul was well regarded among the early church leaders, and he did not point to his status as an encouragement, but rather how he "served with all humility and tears." This is a powerful example to the church, as it shines the light on the fact no church member is more or less deserving of grace than another. The "Hebrew of Hebrew" considers himself to be as unworthy of the sacrifice of Christ as anyone. It is for this reason he proclaims Christ as his central message. Paul's actions prove the truth of what James says in James chapter 2 regarding the way a believer's works flow from his faith. Paul never waivers throughout scripture in preaching Christ and not law, and his actions in his ministry prove the faith he places in the gospel of Christ.

QUESTION: Are there roles within the church you have previously thought should fall on the shoulders of someone else, which are actually the responsibility of all Christians?

QUESTION: Why is it easy for us to fall into the trap of wanting to focus on Paul's work, and rather than encourage our brothers and sisters in the message of grace, we encourage each other to "be better"?

As Paul concludes his time in Ephesus, his parting words to the elders there give them instruction for keeping their focus Christ-centered, lest they become tempted to waiver and instead lead their congregation into dependence on the law.

- 28** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God,
[e] which he obtained with his own blood.[f]
- 29** I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;
- 30** and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Ensuring we "pay attention to ourselves" helps center us in the gospel to help us better serve our brother and sister in Christ. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus addresses pride by using the example of how the prideful call out sin. He tells the hearer regarding these interactions, "you must first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

He does not do this as a call to remove your own sin, but rather so the Christian will realize upon examination they are as imperfect and needy as their fellow Christian. In order to better serve one another, we must lay aside any pride we may have in our perceived status and rightly view our status as fallen sinners in need of infinite grace.

QUESTION: When our fellow Christians are in the midst of a trial, do we find it easier to offer practical advice or support and hope in Christ? Is practical advice always a bad thing? What does the latter look like?

QUESTION: In times you have been feeling hopeless, what are some ways your brothers and sisters in Christ encouraged you? What did you learn through these times that helped you better understand what it means to bear each other's burdens?

PRAISE, PRAYER, AND CONFESSION:

- What can you offer to the Father in praise?
- What is a sin you need to confess?
- What is a burden we can carry?
- What can we take to our Father in prayer?

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