



## **THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH** (Week 7) - Leadership

### **Introduction**

**What is an elder? Some old guy? A Mormon who knocks at your door? Most churches have elders, but what are they? Who are they? Alexander Strauch, in his book, *Biblical Eldership*, maintains that though most churches have some form of elders most are not actually practicing biblical eldership.**

When he was preparing a sermon on biblical eldership himself, he was shocked to find there were no full length treatments on the subject, which is indicative of the problem.

But in his book he writes that many churches have a view of biblical eldership that runs along these lines:

“Members of a congregation’s board of elders are not assistant pastors. They assist their pastor... Through the senior pastor, elders establish a caring link with each person on the professional staff, whether assistant pastor; director of Christian education, evangelism.... But, even more important, elders help facilitate and strengthen the working relationship of the church staff.” Such a view, however, not only lacks scriptural support but flatly contradicts the New Testament Scriptures.

Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Kindle Locations 132-135). Lewis & Roth Publishers. Kindle Edition.

In other words, an unbiblical view of eldership dominates the church today. Now, we won’t be able to remedy this issue in a

single sermon, but regarding church structure and government, let us begin here with biblical eldership.

Today we’re really going to look at the journey of an elder according to the biblical record.

The first part of the journey is an example set. The elders that Paul put into place had a wonderful example of how to care for the church in Paul himself (as do we ourselves).

## 1. Example Set

### Acts 20:17-31

17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

There is what we call a plurality of elders, meaning more than one. There is safety in numbers. There is encouragement in numbers. There is support in not going it alone.

18 And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia,

There was an example set for these elders. Paul led them by example. As a matter of fact Paul said, "Follow me as I follow Christ." So, Paul was an example who pointed to THE example.

He walked with such a clear conscience before the Lord that he could say with great confidence, "You witnessed my life. You were close enough to detect sincerity or insincerity. You know me because you know my life."

So, what were the traits of Paul's life?

19 serving the Lord with all humility

Paul uses this phrasing a lot.

## **Ephesians 4:2**

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

Paul was humble. He didn't think less of himself, but he didn't think more of himself than he should. The point of humility is that he thought of himself less. So, he served with humility, because his mind was not focused on himself. The focus of his life was single-

minded and we will see what that single-minded focus was as we move along.

and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews;

He served with tears. He was burdened for people. You can't fake a burden. He was concerned about the souls of people. He was concerned about their eternal destinies. He was concerned that people who don't know Christ would come to know Christ in a real way. And he was concerned that Christians might be legitimate Christians and not self-deceived by mentally agreeing with the gospel, yet not having any change in their lives.

And because of his concern there were trials. Because he wanted to see people put their faith in Christ, his work in presenting Christ was opposed. We can be assured that if we are a Great Commission church that we will encounter some opposition.

But then he goes on.

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.

**Paul's focus in his relationships with people was the gospel. That is the first function of an elder, to safeguard the gospel. Are we preaching the gospel? Are people understanding the gospel? Are we preserving the gospel?**

22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by 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.

**This is Paul's single-minded focus in life.**

25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all,

**That is quite a statement of responsibility. This is why sometimes I might press you in a way that is foreign to you concerning the gospel. It will be especially new to you if you're new to church life or at least a church that centers on the gospel. But that is why I might press sometimes, to make sure you consider the force of the gospel in regard to your own life,**

**because the gospel of Jesus Christ is relevant to every person's life. The Christian worldview is an all-encompassing worldview that says God commands all men and women to repent and believe the gospel. It's an outrageous claim, I know. But that is our call not just as elders of the church, but as Christians. Our call is to gently, lovingly, respectfully share this truth with you.**

27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 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, which he obtained with his own blood.

**Overseer, elder, pastor are all the same role. Now, some elders are supported by the church financially for the specific ministry of the Word and other elders have secular vocations, so to speak.**

## **1 Timothy 5:17-18**

17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

**What is one of the ways elders care for the church of God?**

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.

**Elders care for the flock by preserving the gospel and a robust theological perspective. Elders must understand the depths of the gospel, so that they can guard the flock from biblical error, from false spirituality or from pretentious spirituality where think we have to justify every decision we make with some spiritual sounding jargon.**

If Strauch is right in his claim that most churches do not practice biblical eldership, then this is probably why so much false doctrine has crept into the church, because churches don't have the type of elders who recognize false doctrine or biblical error.

## **Titus 1:9**

9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

**The first call of the elder is to preserve sound doctrine. How is that done without any training? When someone remarked to me a couple of weeks ago in response to the book**

**our elder candidates are going through in our eldership process, "I would never be an elder at your church." What he was really saying is that his particular church doesn't extensively train their elders. Unfortunately, that is more common than not in churches.**

31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish (warn) every one with tears.

**You read this description of Paul's ministry and it's no wonder that people came to know Christ under his ministry. He deeply cared for people's souls. But to show that care isn't just about talking softly to people. It's about making sure they have grasped the gospel.**

**This is the type of description that displays the tension of the Christian life. We are saved by complete grace. Jesus did it all for us. Provided everything we needed for our salvation. We provided nothing. We contributed nothing. But within that grace is responsibility. Now that we have freedom in Christ we are free to give all for Christ.**

**Before we become Christians we do not want to give all of ourselves because our hearts are hard and dark toward God and our hearts are bent inward toward self. But after the new**

birth, after we are given new hearts by God we want to please Him. And we see the depth of that in Paul, the example set.

## 2. Qualification Met

### 1 Timothy 3:1-7

3 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach,

What does it mean to be above reproach? Well, let's answer that question this way. Let's start with what it can't mean. If we think it means that people have no complaints or criticisms about you, then we have two big problems — namely, Paul and Jesus.

In his own letters, Paul writes that there were people who:

- opposed him
  - deserted him
  - were ashamed of him
- (2 Tim. 1:8, 15, 16; 4:10, 14-16)

He was accused of being:

- fickle

- foolish
  - overly weak
  - overly harsh
- (2 Cor. 1:12-23; 10:1-10)

He was called:

- a rabble-rouser
  - an enemy of the Bible
  - an enemy of Moses
- (Acts 21:27-36)

So, if being above reproach means all people generally like you and have no complaints about you or say nothing negative about you, Paul was not above reproach.

Now, let's look at Jesus.

Jesus was accused of being:

- a glutton (Luke 7:34)
- a drunkard (Luke 7:34)
- a false prophet (Luke 7:39)
- a friend of people with bad reputations (Luke 7:34)
- out of his mind (Mark 3:21)
- demon-possessed (John 10:19-20, 31-33)
- a blasphemer - speaking false things about God (Matt. 26:57-67)

So, then what does it mean to be above reproach? Paul begins both lists of the qualifications of being an elder with this same phrase — above reproach. The what follows “above reproach” becomes the definition of what it means to be above reproach.

**So, here is what it means to be above reproach:**

the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

**The issue is this, as it was for Ephesus, that “the leadership of the church should bring no unnecessary disrepute upon the church through improper and immoral actions” (Mounce, Pastoral Epistles, 183). Basically, elders should walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.**

### 3. Response Given

#### Hebrews 13:17-19

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. 19 I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

### 4. Care Given

#### 1 Peter 5:1-5

5 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”