

“What is an ‘Elder?’”

(selected Scriptures)

Introduction

- Every year the members of this church vote to elect men to serve as its elders. And every year (for the past several years) we provide the church with biblical resources regarding the position, responsibility, and qualifications of an elder. And every year we tell you that “this is not a popularity contest”, and we encourage you to study the Scriptures and pray before you vote. And every year (for the past few years), I think to myself: “It would be good to preach a sermon on the biblical role of an elder *before* we vote!”
- It is important for us to learn, and be reminded of, the high and holy calling of being a spiritual leader in the church. The position of ‘elder’ in the church is a God-ordained, not man-invented, position of spiritual leadership in the church. It dates back to the Old Testament in describing those (older men) whom God had appointed to be leaders among His people.

However, as we see throughout Scripture and human history, leadership – even spiritual leadership – has been abused and maligned. This is nothing new. Authority has a way of bringing out the worst in the one who has it, as well as in those who are asked to submit to it. But we cannot simply dismiss the need for authority figures or ignore our need for good leaders (Mk.6:34). Authority and leadership are not bad words, or corrupt concepts. The answer to our leadership/authority problems is not no leadership, but godly/Christlike leadership – true servant-leadership.

Mark 10:42-45 ~ “And Jesus called them to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

- Clearly, a lot has been said and a lot can be said about leadership, and there is no shortage of people who are giving advice (opinions), offering their perspective, concerning what makes a great leader. As for Christians, and the church, we do not look to the secular world for our understanding of leadership. Rather, we look to the Scriptures. For the calling and quality of a leader in Scripture is vastly different than what is found in a secular worldview. Unfortunately, many churches today are seeking to emulate a secular model of leadership (i.e. based on the paradigms and strategies (and leaders) of “successful” companies like Starbucks, IBM/Microsoft/Apple, Amazon, Walmart, etc.).

Consequently, leadership is often identified in terms of charisma, intelligence, eloquence, attraction/appeal, influence, wealth, status/popularity, or revenue – even in the church. Contrary to what many think of leadership today, Jesus defined leadership in terms of sacrifice, love, humility, service, truth, mercy, virtue, godliness, and selflessness.

- For our time this morning, I would like to give a quick overview of New Testament teaching on the church office (spiritual position) of an elder – six aspects of the biblical teaching of an ‘elder.’

1. The Description of an elder

- There are essentially three main words used in the New Testament to identify spiritual leaders in the church: elder, pastor, and overseer.

A. Defined

“elder(s)” (*presbyteros*) – The word simply means “older” and can be used generally to refer to someone who is old (or older), or more specifically to describe a leader in the church. The idea here is that, generally speaking, older people are to be wiser, tested/proven, more experienced.

1 Tim 5:17 ~ “Let the elders [*presbyteros*] who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”

1 Tim 5:19 ~ “Do not admit a charge against an elder [*presbyteros*] except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.”

Titus 1:5 ~ “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders [*presbyteros*] in every town as I directed you”

James 5:14 ~ “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders [*presbyteros*] of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

1 Peter 5:1 ~ “So I exhort the elders [*presbyteros*] among you, as a fellow elder [*sympresbyteros*] and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed”

“pastor” or “shepherd” (*poimainō*) – This word, both literally and figuratively, means shepherd. Literally, it describes those who responsible for the leading, feeding, tending, and protecting of sheep. Figuratively, it refers to those who are responsible for the leading, feeding, tending, and protecting of the church; i.e., God’s flock, or His sheep (Ps.21:1; 100:3; Jn.10:11-14, 8; Acts 20:28).

John 21:16 ~ “[Jesus] said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend [*poimainō*] my sheep.’”

Acts 20:28 ~ “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock [*poimnion*], in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [*poimainō*] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

Eph 4:11-12 ~ “And [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds [*poimēn*; or ‘pastors’] and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”

1 Peter 5:2-4 ~ “shepherd [*poimainō*] the flock [*poimnion*] of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock [*poimnion*]. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd [*archipoimēn*] appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

“overseer” (*episkopeō*) – This is a literal translation of the word, for it is a compound (*epi* + *skopos*) word referring to someone who “looks upon” or “watches over” a group of people. This, in the New Testament, is a synonym of the term elder, and describes the function of a spiritual leader as someone who governs over the affairs of the church.

Acts 20:28 ~ “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*episkopeō*], to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

Phil 1:1 ~ “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers [*episkopeō*] and deacons”

1 Tim 3:1-2 ~ “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer [*episkopeō*], he desires a noble task. ²Therefore an overseer [*episkopeō*] must be above reproach, the husband of one wife,

Titus 1:7 ~ “For an overseer [*episkopeō*], as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain”

B. Depicted

- All three terms describe essentially the same spiritual leadership position of a pastor or elder. In fact, in the following passages, each term is used to describe the role and work of an elder/pastor:

1 Peter 5:1-4 ~ “So I exhort the **elders** [*presbyteros*] among you, as a **fellow elder** [*sympresbyteros*] and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:
²**shepherd** [*poimainō*] the **flock** [*poimnion*] of God that is among you, **exercising oversight** [*episkopeō*], not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;
³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the **flock** [*poimnion*]. ⁴And when the **chief Shepherd** [*archipoimēn*] appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

Acts 20:17-18, 28 ~ “Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the **elders** [*presbyteros*] of the church to come to him. ¹⁸And when they came to him, he said to them: ‘... ²⁸Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the **flock** [*poimnion*], in which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers** [*episkopos*], to **care for** [*poimainō*] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.’”

2. The Calling of an elder

- Thankfully, we have recorded in God’s Word the process for which elders are called to serve as spiritual leaders in the church. It is essentially a three-step process, a process that we seek to emulate and execute each year when we vote for elders in our church.

A. Appointed by God

- First and foremost, we must understand that the position of an elder in the church is divine calling – an elder is a high and holy calling – one that should not be taken lightly or hastily. To be sure, just because someone has the title of an elder or pastor in the church, does not mean that they are actually called by God to be in a position of spiritual authority (there are false prophets, false teachers, and false shepherds). Nevertheless, we must understand that the office, or spiritual authority, of an elder is appointed by God.

Acts 13:2 ~ “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”

Acts 20:28 ~ “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.”

1 Cor 12:28 ~ “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers ...”

B. Identified by the church

- The next step is for the church to identify those among them who should serve as elders. Since God does not identify them with a halo, it is up to the church to prayerfully recognize those who are called by God to lead in the church.

Acts 14:23 ~ “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

Titus 1:5 ~ “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you”

- This step in the process is crucially important. For, as we will see, the qualifications for an elder are incredibly high. Therefore, our standard for those who should serve as spiritual leaders over us should also be high [in my almost 30 years as a pastor, I have often been surprised when the church elected a man to be an elder who does not serve in the church and sometimes barely even attends the church]. It

is incumbent on the church to identify men who are *already* serving as godly leaders and examples in the church (not men who they think might do so if they are elected).

C. Affirmed by the elder

➤ The third step in this process is over unknown or ignored. To put it simply, even bluntly, an elder should believe he is called to be an elder and actually want to serve in the church in the capacity. [I have called many elected/prospective elders only to hear them say, “I don’t really want to, but if the church wants me to, I guess I should” or “I don’t feel that’s my calling, but I guess I’ll give it a try.” When I hear such responses, I quickly show them the following verses]:

1 Tim 3:1 ~ “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires [*oregō*] to the office of overseer, he desires [*epithumeō*] a noble task.”

1 Peter 5:2 ~ “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion [*anankastōs*], but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly”

➤ Elders should not serve begrudgingly or against their own will. In the truest and purest sense, it is not arrogant for a godly man to desire to be an elder – it is the humble desire to fulfill God’s calling in his life. It is arrogant for an elder to think he is ‘God’s gift to the church’, and arrogant for an elder to parade his supposed status in the church, but it is not arrogant to want to be a leader in “*God’s church*” (1Tim.3:5).

➤ The calling of an elder is appointed by God, identified by the church, and affirmed by the elder.

3. The qualifications of an elder

➤ As we always say, “The vote for elders is not a popularity contest.” Thankfully, the Bible gives us specific qualifications for those who are called to serve as elders. There are three main passages in the New Testament where these qualification are explicitly stated.

1 Tim 3:1-7 ~ “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ²Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

Titus 1:5-9 ~ “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you – ⁶if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹He 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.”

1 Peter 5:1-3 ~ “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: ²shepherd 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; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

➤ Notice that church leaders are not selected *to be spiritual*, but are selected because *they are spiritual*. This distinction can hardly be overstated. Church leaders should not be chosen in hopes that they will become spiritually mature, but because they already show spiritual maturity.

In the same way, Christians should not be given spiritual leadership (authority) in the church as a means of enabling/empowering them to serve. Rather, they should be given spiritual leadership because they are already serving.

➤ In these three passages alone, there are at least 20 distinct qualifications for an elder:

- “above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)
- “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)
- “sober-minded” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)
- “self-controlled” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)
- “respectable” (1 Timothy 3:2)
- “hospitable” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)
- “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9)
- “self-controlled” (1 Timothy 3:3)
- “not a drunkard” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
- “not violent but gentle” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
- “not quarrelsome” (1 Timothy 3:3)
- “not of lover of money” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2)
- “manage his own household well ...” (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6)
- “not be a recent convert ...” (1 Timothy 3:6)
- “well thought of by outsiders ...” (1 Timothy 3:7)
- “not arrogant” (Titus 1:7)
- “not quick-tempered” (Titus 1:7)
- “a lover of good” (Titus 1:8)
- “upright” (Titus 1:8)
- “holy” (Titus 1:8)
- “not domineering ...” (1 Peter 5:3)

➤ To be sure, this is a high and holy calling; one that should be sobering for both the leader and the church. Church leaders are to represent Christ in everything they do and say. They are to be examples of Christian virtue, not the exception to it.

➤ Notice also, that “perfection” is not listed among those characteristics that qualify a Christian for church leadership [making a bad decision (or perceived bad decision) or making a mistake, does not disqualify someone from being an elder]. Church leaders are not perfect, but they must demonstrate true Christlike virtue and wisdom. They are not without weakness, they are not immune from making mistakes, but they must humbly seek God’s truth and power. They must recognize their utter dependence upon God, and the high and holy calling they have received from God.

➤ It is also important to note that, for the most part (outside of giftings and duties specific to the office/calling of an elder), these qualifications are applicable to every Christian. Elders are to be examples, epitomizing what it means to be a follower of Christ.

This is similar to the commands for husbands and wives. Wives are commanded to “*submit*” to their husbands (Eph.5:22, 24), but this command is also given to all Christians (Eph.5:21; Rom.13:1; Heb.13:17; 1Pet.2:13). Christians are called to be submissive people, and wives are to specifically exemplify this trait in marriage. Similarly, husbands are called to “*love*” their wives (Eph.5:25ff). Obviously, God commands all Christians to love (Jn.13:34-35; 1Jn.4:7-8). Husbands, however, are to specifically exemplify this trait in marriage.

4. The responsibility of an elder

- The elder's responsibility in the church is massive. In fact, in and of himself the elder is not sufficient to be a spiritual leader (see 1Cor.15:10; 2Cor.2:16; 3:4-6). He therefore must lead with profound humility, and a passionate dependence on God.
- Here are five biblical categories concerning the responsibility of an elder.

A. Leading (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3)

- As we have seen, by very definition, an "elder" or "overseer" is a leader. A leader is a general term describing someone who has the influence and authority to manage, guide, and instruct others. Elders can lead the church in many different ways (e.g., church finances, policies, ministries, counseling, doctrines, etc.).

Ultimately, however, elders are called by God to lead God's people according to God Word, and in harmony with God's will. They are to lead people to Christ and lead them to follow Christ.

1 Tim 5:17-18 ~ "Let the elders who rule [*proistēmi*] well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'"

- These verses imply that there are other duties for the elder than teaching and preaching. In addition, Paul used here the word "rule" to describe one aspect of the elder's responsibility in the church. The Greek word translated "rule" (*proistēmi*; 1Tim.5:17), literally means "to set/stand before" and figuratively refers to the act of leading, serving, presiding, or governing (see Rom.12:8; 1Thess.5:12; 1Tim.3:4, 5, 12).

1 Peter 5:2-3 ~ "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; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

- The elder is to serve the church as a shepherd – guiding, feeding, tending, and protecting of God's sheep ("God's church", 1Tim.3:5; Matt.16:18).

B. Teaching / Preaching

- As spiritual leaders, elders are specifically responsible for the teaching and preaching in the church. Therefore, they must be students of the Word of God – working hard to handle God's Word correctly (2Tim.2:15). This is the primary way shepherds feed the sheep.

1 Tim 3:2 ~ "Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach"

1 Tim 5:17-18 ~ "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'"

Titus 1:9 ~ "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."

Heb 13:7 ~ "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith."

- Elders are not to be political figures in the church – merely making decisions and establishing policies. They are to be 'men of the Word', who believe and understand biblical truth and are able to teach sound doctrine – as well as men who practice what they teach/preach. Like an accomplished musician, or a trained athlete, an elder is to be skilled in the Scriptures and in sound doctrine.

C. Praying

- Elders are to be prayer-warriors. This means they are not only faithful to pray for the church, but also faithful to pray with the church.

Acts 6:1-4 ~ “Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

- It is crucial that an elder be both ‘a man of the word’ and ‘a man of prayer.’ To ask which is more important is kind of like asking which wing on an airplane is most important – the right or the left. Elders need to be men spend time in prayer, and spend time praying with others.

James 5:14 ~ “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

- Notice that, in James 5:14, it is specifically the task of those who are sick to call the elders to pray (not the elder’s job to be ever-scouring the church for those who are sick and those who need prayer). To be sure, an elder can (and should) initiate a time of prayer for those in need, but those who in need are also called to be proactive in seeking prayer with the elders.

D. Protecting

- There is a reason why God choose sheep as the analogous description of Christians (all Christians, pastors and elders too). Sheep are notably defenseless, making them easy prey for those who are “wolves” (see Matt.7:15; 10:16). Therefore, elders (shepherds) are tasked with protecting the church (sheep).

They do this by protecting the church from false teachers and false teaching. Sometimes this is done formally and publicly, and sometimes this is done more informally or privately. In both ways, the elder is called upon by God to protect the church from sin and heresy.

Acts 20:17, 28-31 ~ “Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. ... ²⁸Pay 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. ²⁹I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.”

Eph 4:11-14 ~ “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

E. Serving

- Unfortunately, some elders view their high and holy calling as a badge of honor that excludes them from doing having to serve or do menial tasks in the church. Biblically, this is certainly not the case. Jesus is not only a perfect example of servant-leadership, He also commanded us to be servant-leaders.

1 Peter 5:3 ~ “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

Matt 20:25-28 ~ “But Jesus called them to him and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’” (see Jn.13:15; Eph.5:2; 1Pet.2:21)

5. The authority of an elder

➤ As we have seen, the elders of a church are appointed by God to serve in the capacity of spiritual leadership in the church. They are called upon by God to exercise this authority according to the will of God. And, as we will see, they are ultimately accountable to God for how they serve as elders.

Acts 20:28 ~ [Paul to the elders at the church in Ephesus]: “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.”

Titus 1:7 ~ “For an overseer, as God’s steward [*oikonomos*], must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain”

1 Peter 5:2-3 ~ “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; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

1 Tim 5:17-18 ~ “Let the elders who rule [*proistēmi*] well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”

➤ The congregation is then commanded to submit to the authority of these elders, when (and only when) the elders are leading biblically, and must submit [note: it is not submission if you only submit to the elders when they agree with you, or do what you want; and to think the elders are wise only when they agree with you is merely (arrogantly) to think yourself wise].

Heb 13:17 ~ “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.”

➤ It is important to note, that the elder’s authority is limited to spiritual leadership in the church. He does not have authority outside the church, or authority outside of Scripture (e.g., an elder has no right to tell you what house you can buy, or what job you can have, or whom you should marry, etc.). God Word commands us to submit to elder in matters doctrine and faith.

Heb 13:7 ~ “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

Eph 4:11-15 ~ “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

1 Cor 11:1 ~ “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

6. The accountability of an elder

➤ An elder is accountable to God for how he leads and for what he teaches (and for how he fails to lead and what he fails to teach). Since they are to represent God, in what they say and what they do, they are held to greater degree of accountability.

Heb 13:17 ~ “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account [*apodidōmi logos*]. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

James 3:1 ~ “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness [*krima meizōn*].”

➤ Much like the prophets in the Old Testament, the pastor/elder is one who functions in the role of being a spokesman for God – giving God’s Word to the people. In the Old Testament, false prophets were to be executed (stoned to death) for misrepresenting God’s Word. This is a graphic illustration of how serious God is about concerning His Word, and how important it is for those who teach God’s Word to be faithful to God’s Word.

But the elder/pastor is also accountable to God for how he behaves as a spiritual leader. For, by basic definition, a leader is one who has people following him. Elders are to be examples to the flock of what it means to be a mature Christian, to live a Christlike life. To lead others astray, either by what is said or done, is a grievous sin with severe consequences (see Matt.18:5-6).

1 Peter 5:1-4 ~ “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: ²shepherd 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; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

1 Cor 11:1 ~ “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

➤ It is important to keep in mind, however, that we all are held accountable by God for that which we say and do:

Matt 12:36-37 ~ “I tell you, on the day of judgment [*krisis*] people will give account [*apodidōmi logos*] for every careless word they speak, ³⁷for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned [*katadikazō*].”

Heb 4:13 ~ “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account [*ho logos*].”

➤ Spiritual leaders on the church – pastors, elders, deacons/deaconesses, teachers – have a greater accountability because they have a greater spiritual influence.

Conclusion

➤ It is important to remember that an elder is called by God to be an example of Jesus Christ to the church, called to live a Christlike life. Again, this is not a political position but a spiritual one. Elders are to portray Jesus and lead us to Jesus, but they are not Jesus.

It is important to note that Jesus is the supreme object of our admiration and worship, and Christlikeness is to be our greater pursuit and purpose.

♦ Jesus is our “*chief shepherd*”:

1 Peter 5:4 ~ “And when the chief Shepherd [*archipōimēn*] appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

♦ Jesus is our “*good shepherd*”:

John 10:11 ~ “I am the good shepherd [*poimēn*]. The good shepherd [*poimēn*] lays down his life for the sheep.” (see vs.14)

- ♦ Jesus is our “*great shepherd*”:

Heb 13:20 ~ “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd [*poimēn*] of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant”

- ♦ Jesus is our ultimate “*Overseer*”:

1 Peter 2:25 ~ “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd [*poimēn*] and Overseer [*episkopos*] of your souls.”

- ♦ Jesus is the “*head*” of the church:

Col 1:18 ~ “And he is the head [*kephalē*] of the body, the church. He is the beginning [*archē*], the firstborn [*prōtotokos*] from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent [*prōteuō*” (see Eph.1:22-23; 5:23; Col.2:10; Matt.16:18)