

# Shepherding the Flock

*"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."  
(Acts 20:28)*



What Elders Do For the Church (Part 1)

In the previous lessons, we have examined the qualifications or qualities needed in those who would serve as elders within the Lord's church. Elders are men who are mature in the faith, knowledgeable in the Scripture, and willing and able to teach others. Those who serve as elders must have a good reputation and be self-controlled in their attitudes and actions. Their motives must be focused on others as they work to see the members of the church grow in wisdom and strength.

We have briefly discussed some of the roles that elders have within the church and in this lesson, we will dig a little deeper.

## Elders are to teach, train, and mature the flock.

One of the most important roles that elders (along with evangelists) must fulfill is that of *"equipping the saints for the work of ministry"* (Ephesians 4:12). This is a lofty sounding phrase, but what does it mean?

The Greek word (*katartismos*) translated in Ephesians 4:12 as *"equipping"* in the ESV, is rendered as *"prepare"* in the NIV and *"perfecting"* in the KJV. The word is used in the verb form thirteen times in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> Consider how this word is used in some other instances.

*In lesson 1 we saw that apostles and prophets were foundational roles that were needed in the first century of the church. We still have the evangelists as well as shepherds and teachers (or pastors and teachers) otherwise known as elders.*

Luke 6:40 *"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."*

Matthew 4:21 *"And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them."*

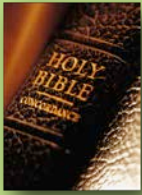
Galatians 6:1 *"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."*

1 Thessalonians 3:9-10 *"For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?"*

1. After reading all the verses above, write a one sentence definition for the word translated as *"equipping"* in Ephesians 4:12.

<sup>1</sup> Boles, Kenny. *Thirteen Lessons on Ephesians*. College Press.

## 2. In what way or ways does a disciple become like his teacher?



### Ephesians 4:11-16

11 “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until 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, 14 so 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. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

The elders along with the evangelists are to “equip” the saints for the work of ministry. All Christians are “saints” since this simply means one that is set apart for God. The words “Christian” and “saint” are used interchangeably in the New Testament. The saints are not equipped so that they can do all the work within the church. Elders and evangelists are to work alongside members of church even as they train and equip them for ministry. Elders model service and serve as examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:3).

## 3. What is the work of ministry?

There are many ways to do the work of ministry. Since ministry literally means service, it has the idea of helping another whether that be preparing a meal for someone, meeting other physical needs, or sharing the Gospel. In the New Testament, two-thirds of the uses of the word “ministry” have to do with meeting physical needs.<sup>2</sup>



Elders and evangelists equip Christians for ministry by: 1) Teaching Biblical truths; 2) Modelling Christian service; 3) Encouraging Christians to use their gifts for service; 4) Providing ministry training. Ministry takes place mostly outside of the church assembly and is focused on others.

## 4. Do you believe that you have been properly equipped in past by the elders and evangelists? What could they specifically do to help you?

## 5. According to Ephesians 4, what is the purpose of being equipped for the work of ministry?

The teaching ministry of the elders includes providing sound Biblical teaching to protect the church against “*every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by the craftiness of deceitful schemes.*” There is great peril in being misled by false doctrines which may offer the appearance of spirituality, but which lead a person farther from truth.

<sup>2</sup> Boles. Ibid.

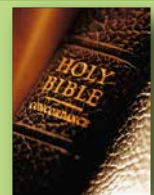
Because the danger of false teaching is so great the elders are to be mature Christians (1 Tim 3:6), who are able to teach the Scripture (1 Tim 3:2) in a way that is doctrinally sound (Titus 1:9). They must have proved that they hold firm to truth (Titus 1:9) and must be bold enough to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine (Titus 1:9).

In Acts 20:28-31 the Apostle Paul urges the elders in Ephesus to “*pay careful attention*” to both themselves and the church. He warned that *fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*” These wolves will even include some from their own number who will speak “*twisted things*” so that they might mislead others. To protect the flock, the elders must “*be alert*” which comes from the Greek word *gregoreo* meaning to keep awake or to avoid sleeping. It is impossible to miss the tone of Paul as he admonishes to the Ephesian elders “*with tears.*” They were to remain constantly vigilant because any lapse on their part could mean disaster for the flock.



### Acts 20:28-31

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. 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. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.



In this passage we see that the elders have been made overseers by the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who inspired the Gospel writers from which we find such passages as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. He provided the pattern of eldership that we follow even today. The church belongs to God and was purchased through the blood of Jesus.

6. What words and phrases does Paul use in Acts 20:28-31 to express the seriousness of the danger that faced the church?
7. From where will the false teachers come?
8. Describe the meaning of “twisted things” in verse 30.
9. What does Galatians 1:6-9 tell us about the seriousness of false teaching? (These false teachers were adding to the gospel. We have no authority to add or subtract a single word from the Scripture.)
10. What can elders do to protect the church against false teaching?