

# 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 2)

## Elders are to Lead the Church

The Scripture teaches that all Christians are priests. 1 Peter 2:4-5 says, *"As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* 1 Peter 2:9 says of Christians, *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."*

### 1. What words does 1 Peter 2 use to describe the nature of the Christian priesthood?

In the Old Testament, priests served as intermediaries between God and man to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. Today, the Scripture teaches that all Christians are to offer *"spiritual sacrifices."* These sacrifices are our good works and proclamation of the excellencies of Christ. Additionally Christians can approach God the Father in prayer at any time through Jesus Christ our high priest (Ephesians 5:20; Hebrews 13:20-21; 1 Timothy 2:5). We have free access to the throne of God (Ephesians 2:18).

### 2. How do we make spiritual sacrifices to God?

Though all Christians are priests, the New Testament Church does have organisation and there is a leadership structure within the church. Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18) and chief shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), but as the following Scriptures show the elders do exercise leadership in the New Testament Church. Read the verses below to identify the function of leadership inherent in the eldership.



1 Timothy 5:17 *"Let the elders who rule<sup>1</sup> well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching."*

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: 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; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."*

<sup>1</sup> In lesson 2, we discussed the word "rule" or "direct" carries the meaning of leading, but also has the sense of "caring for." Thus the word is not one of harsh rule, but careful leading.

Hebrews 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.*”

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 “*We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*”

The words rule, shepherd, exercising oversight, obey, submit, respect, over, and admonish indicate that there is a definite role of leadership in the eldership. Elders lead by example (1 Peter 5:3) in a way that is both gentle and firm in contrast to one who is domineering. God has instructed us to submit to him (James 4:7) and to submit to the elders. Those who refuse to submit to the leadership of the elders rebel against God.

3. Describe the responsibility of leadership from the verses above.
4. From reading the verse above, what should be the response of the congregation to the elders?
5. What is meant by “double-honour” in 1 Timothy 5:17?
6. Why is it necessary to have church leaders when the head of the church is Christ?

The “work” or “labour” of leadership is a demanding responsibility and for the eldership to be successful, the elders must be spiritual men who lovingly lead the flock. Likewise the congregation must willingly and lovingly submit to their leadership. Alexander Strauch writes, *Biblical eldership, however cannot exist in an atmosphere of nominal Christianity. There can be no biblical eldership in a church where there is no biblical Christianity. If a biblical eldership is to function effectively, it requires men who are firmly committed to our Lord’s principles of discipleship. Biblical eldership is dependent on men who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33), men who have presented themselves as living sacrifices to God and slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 12:1,2), men who love Jesus Christ above all else and willingly sacrifice self for the sake of others, men who love as Christ loved, men who are self-disciplined and self-sacrificing, and men who have taken up the cross and are willing to suffer for Christ.*<sup>2</sup>



Elders also lead in financial matters. In the early days of the church a famine arose. Acts 11:27-30 tells us, “*Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.*” Luke does not go into any detail about how the elders distributed the funds, but we do see them responsible and accountable for the sound management of church finances.

<sup>2</sup> Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership*. p. 27-28.

### Elders are to Be Men of Prayer



If the church is to be a people of prayer, the example must be set by the elders. In James 5:14-16, *“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. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”*

In this passage the elders are praying for specific needs of individual members. Elders should pray regularly for the members of the church. The leadership of elders lies more in prayer than in organisation. In his book, *They Smell Like Sheep Volume 2*, in a section titled *“Leading From Our Knees”* Dr. Lynn Anderson quotes Rick Atchley who once said, *“God likely will not empower shepherds whose meetings consist of two minutes of ‘agonizing’ and three hours of ‘organizing’ (two minutes of prayer and, three hours of talk).” Today, too, the best shepherds of God’s people model the priority of prayer in the midst of the fray. Not as a last resort, but as the first step. Rick calls this “leading through pleading.”*<sup>3</sup>

**7. List four reasons why elders should be men of prayer.**

**8. What should be the primary content of the elders’ prayers for the church?**

### Elders are to Be Men Who Care

James 5 teaches that the first people who should be called in a crisis are the elders of the church. Just as Palestinian shepherds cared for the health and well-being of the sheep, the elders of the church care for the spiritual flock. In James 5:14-16, the elders come, pray, and anoint the sick person with oil in the name of Jesus.

While James says the sick person will be healed, we know that God is not compelled to answer every prayer with healing; however God has the power to heal and may intervene specifically because of the prayers of the elders. (Note that *“the elders of the church”* were called. It was not *“an elder”* or *“the evangelist.”* A plurality of elders working together shepherd the flock.)

James also says that if the illness has been caused by sin the person can find forgiveness and healing through confession and prayer. In no way is all sickness related to personal sin, but God may punish and rebuke in this way at times (1 Corinthians 11:29-30).

The pastoral ministry of the elders is needed when Christians face times of crisis such as the death of a loved one, marital difficulties, financial struggles, emotional stress, or problems with children. Elders are truly men who care.

*The purpose of the oil in James 5:14 has been debated. Some say it simply means that the elders both pray and seek medical attention for those who are sick. Olive oil was used for medicinal purposes in the first century. Perhaps the oil is symbolic, but that does not necessarily mean we should not still employ its use. In Mark 6:13, Jesus sends out the twelve apostles who anointed with oil and many sick were healed. Certainly Jesus could heal apart from oil, but for some reason he blessed its use. In James 5:14 the sick person is anointed with oil “in the name of the Lord.” In the Old Testament, people who were set apart for a specific purpose were anointed with oil.*

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, Lynn. *They Smell Like Sheep, Vol. 2*. New York, NY: Howard Books, 2007. p. 34.