

Elders, Overseers, and Pastors

Much can be said, has been said, and perhaps needs to be said about New Testament elders/overseers. Hundreds, if not thousands of pages have been written fleshing out the specific teachings of the New Testament regarding this office of church leadership. The issue of elders/overseers is a critical one for all local churches and one that Grace takes seriously because we take the Scriptures seriously. This brief paper will not be exhaustive and is not intended to be. Lord willing, this paper will be informative and helpful. While much can be said, has been said, and perhaps needs to be said about New Testament elders/overseers this paper will focus on three main questions: 1) What are New Testament Elders/Overseers? 2) Who is Qualified to be a Local Church Elder/Overseer? 3) What do New Testament Elders/Overseers Do?

What are New Testament Elders/Overseers?

It is difficult to ascertain at exactly what point in time elders/overseers were recognized as an official office within the local church. The first recorded instance of elders being appointed is in Acts 14:23 whereas the first recorded use of the word “elder” in a Church context is found in Acts 11:30. In Acts 14:23 Luke writes, “*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.*”¹ While this may be the first recorded instance of Church elders being appointed we do see the word elder present in the Gospel accounts that Matthew, Mark, and Luke left for us. In those books, we have references to elders but these elders are a part of the Jewish rulers and not a part of the local church. In fact, Luke records that when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane it was the Chief Priests, Officers of the Temple, and Elders who came out against him. So while the word elder does appear in the New Testament before Acts 11, it is in Acts 14 that we see the first local church elders being appointed. And as the Church is born and begins to grow, we see that the Jewish “elder” is reconstituted as an office of leadership within the local church.

In Acts 15, Luke records for us that Paul and Barnabas are sent to Jerusalem to discuss the matter of Gentile inclusion in the church. As they came to Jerusalem, “they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders”². As the early church is still in its infant stages, Luke references three separate and unique groups in the church, “the church” or general congregation, “the apostles” who were specifically commissioned by Jesus to have a unique authority, and “the elders.” Given these Scripture references we can conclude that elders have been a part of the local church since the very beginning days of her existence.³

To understand then what New Testament elders/overseers are we need to direct our attention now to 1 Timothy and Titus, two letters written by the Apostle Paul to local church pastors. In these letters, Paul specifically addresses the important task of appointing and recognizing elders/overseers to lead the church, a leadership that was not to be done solely by a “pastor.” Paul writes to Titus and specifically tells him that he is to “*put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you*”⁴. In 1 Timothy, Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, where Timothy is a young pastor, and instructs him regarding “overseers” and who is qualified to fill this role of leadership. The reason

¹ Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved

² Acts 15:4

³ Paul also makes mention to Overseers in his address to the Philippians church. In Philippians, he tells us that his letter is written to “the saints, overseers, and the deacons.”

⁴ Titus 1:5

for Paul's instruction to Timothy stems from the fulfillment of the prophetic warning he gave the Ephesian Elders in Acts 20. There, Acts 20:28, Paul tells these men, "*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. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*" The warning had been given, the danger was real, and it was now being realized in the Ephesian church. Wolves had come in and were not sparing the flock.

It is important to note, as we look at Acts 20, 1 Timothy, and Titus, how interchangeably Paul (and Luke) uses the words elder and overseer. In Acts 20:17, Paul calls the "elders" of the church to him. In Acts 20:28, he tells these "elders" that the Holy Spirit has made them "overseers". In 1 Timothy, Paul gives the qualifications for "overseers" and in his letter to Titus, Paul instructs him to appoint elders and that these "overseers" "must be above reproach." Furthermore, we must also notice that Paul writes to the church in Ephesus and tells them that Christ has given to his church "shepherds" (which many Bible translations use "Pastor") which is the noun form of the same word Paul uses to describe what the elders in Ephesus are to do; care or shepherd the flock of God. It is appropriate for us to conclude that the words, elder, overseer, and pastor/shepherd represent the same office of leadership and are used as synonyms. Jeramie Rinne writes in his very helpful book *Church Elders*, "Biblically speaking, elders are pastors, who are overseers. The person in a church we typically call a "pastor" is a paid elder, and the person in a church we typically call an "elder" or "overseer" is an unpaid, lay pastor. Elder or shepherd, overseer or pastor, paid or volunteer, it's all the same job."⁵ At Grace we have found firefighters to be helpful in aiding our understanding of paid and non-paid elders. Whether a paid fireman or a volunteer fireman, *all* firemen fight fires and while there may be certain individuals that have been given greater responsibility in leading the team of fireman, all fireman are still fireman. Similarly, all elders are elders whether paid or non-paid.

It is our understanding and conviction that the best way to describe the relationship between paid and non-paid elders is by the phrase "first among equals." We are not the originators of the phrase but we find it very helpful. What "first among equals" describes is the role and responsibility of the Senior Pastor to lead the leaders. He is the first and yet he is among equals. Alexander Strauch writes in his landmark book *Biblical Eldership*,

Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication. Therefore, those among the elders who are particularly gifted leaders and/or teacher will naturally stand out among the other elders as leaders and teachers within the leadership body...in many cases, but not all, this will require the congregation to provide financial support so that the gifted brother can give more time to the service of the local church.⁶

Functionally, this means that the Senior Pastor does not do whatever he wants *because* he has a title. Rather, he leads the leaders in seeking the Lord's will for the church. On the flip side, the phrase also means that the non-paid elders recognize that the Senior Pastor has been asked to lead in ways that they are unable to lead. This inability may be due to the lack of training, time, or experience. Therefore, while the Senior Pastor does not make all the decisions in the church, he has been called by the other elders and the congregation to indeed lead them and to make decisions.

⁵ Rinne, Jeramie. *Church Elders*. Crossway. Wheaton Ill. Pg. 15. 2014

⁶ Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership*. Lewis and Roth Publishers. Littleton CO. Pg. 45, 48. 1995.

Taking these observations together we can begin to gather an understanding of what a New Testament elder/overseer/pastor is. An elder/overseer/pastor is a man who has been made an elder/overseer/pastor by the Holy Spirit, recognized and appointed by other godly individuals, and responsible for caring for the church that Jesus bought with his own blood.

Who is Qualified to be a Local Church Elder/Overseer/Pastor? ⁷

Very specific qualifications are given regarding the type of man that is able to function in the office of elder. Paul writes in 1 Timothy and Titus two very similar lists of qualifications that men who are being considered as elders must meet, and men who are elders must persist in. These qualifications are not one time bench marks to reach, they make up the continual standard that *all* elders, paid and non-paid, must consistently meet. Below are the qualifications from 1 Timothy and Titus along with definitions to explain what each qualifications means.⁸

Above Reproach (blameless)—Not sinless perfection, but one who is free from “no valid accusation.”⁹ This person goes the extra step, even when completely out of the way, to make sure that all situations and relationships are free from the accusation of others. This first characteristic is a broad umbrella that all the other characteristics fall underneath. In every area that follows, elders pastors, and overseers are to be “above reproach.”

Husband of One Wife—Literally translated a “man of one woman.” One who is a faithful husband and father.¹⁰ This man’s marriage is an example to the church.

Manage His Household Well—Describes the man who is actively leading his home well. “He rules and cares.”¹¹ He does not sit passively by and expect his wife or children to care for the affairs of the home. As a godly man, he demonstrates initiating leadership with his wife and children. Leading and guiding them to love Jesus well and caring for the details of the home in a respectable and orderly way.

Children are believers...not in debauchery or insubordinate—While the salvation of anyone is completely outside any persons control, fathers do have an incredible role and influence in the lives of their children. If a man loves Jesus, his wife, and his children well, it stands to reason that his wife and children will also love Jesus and each other well, thus not being opened to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. Similar to Paul’s criteria in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, “He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive.” Paul holds church leaders responsible for living out their faith in a compelling and passionate manner, consistently demonstrating Gospel-Centered love to their families first, and then to the church body.

⁷ For ease of reading "elder" will now be used to refer to all three.

⁸ The entire list is given here to demonstrate the sheer weight of qualifications that are placed on elders. Duplicates between 1 Timothy & Titus have been removed.

⁹ MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*. Thomas Nelson Publishing. Dallas TX. 2005. Pg. 1785

¹⁰ Different churches, denominations, and pastors have different understandings as to whether this precludes someone who has been divorced from ever being an elder. For our position on this matter please reference the “Husband of One Wife” Position Paper.

¹¹ Stott. Pg. 98

Prospective elders or pastors who have failed in their homes at functionally living out the Gospel should not be given authority over members of the church.

Children are Submissive—His children are respectful of his authority because he is gracious as a father and cares for them well.

Not Arrogant—Describes a person who does not believe he is always right. The sin of pride, throughout the Scriptures, is seen to be a root sin that leads to other sinful behaviors. Proverbs 16:18 states, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before the fall.” Conversely those who are humble are promised blessings.¹²

Not Quick-tempered—The Greek word for “quick tempered” means choleric or peppery.¹³ This describes someone who lacks self-control and “blows their top”. This person demonstrates patience and gentleness in the midst of frustrating, messy, and sinful circumstances.

Not A drunkard—The Bible never prohibits the use of alcohol, rather the lack of or loss of self-control as the result of alcohol, or strong drink, and by extension any substance that removes the ability to control yourself.¹⁴ Consistent throughout the Scriptures is the command to walk by¹⁵ and be filled¹⁶ with the Spirit as opposed to drunkenness.

It is also important to note that culturally the use of alcohol carries with it connotations and assumptions which, while unfair, can damage someone’s creditability. It is therefore very important that if an elder or church leader does partake in alcohol, in moderation as the Bible allows, that he does so in wisdom considering the environment where he is in and whom he is around. Furthermore, Romans chapters 14 and 15 tell us that our freedom in Christ should never become a stumbling block for another believer. We are to always defer on preference issues for the sake of our brothers or sisters.

Not Violent—Describes a person who does not lead his home, or the church, by self-assertion or force. This person is not a “bully, violent person.”¹⁷ This is also potentially a byproduct of drunkenness.

Not Greedy for gain—Church leaders should be motivated by the Gospel and compelled by Christ’s love, not money. The love of money is a characteristic of false teachers.¹⁸

¹² Matthew. 5:3. 1 Peter 5:6-7

¹³ Stott, John. *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*. IVP. Downers Grove, ILL. 1996. Pg. 177

¹⁴ In Ephesians 5:18 Paul contrasts being “filled with the Spirit” with being “drunk with wine”. Paul writes this command in the present tense with a passive voice, thus indicating that believers are to continually (present) surrender themselves to the Spirit’s filling, and control, in their lives (passive). The exhortation to be “filled with the Spirit” is a continual command to allow the Holy Spirit to control our thoughts, actions, and emotions. I believe we could apply these texts principally beyond alcohol to prescription drug abuse, marijuana, stimulants, depressants, and any substance that alters someone’s mental capacity for clear thinking, self-control, and Spirit filled.

¹⁵ Galatians 5:16

¹⁶ Ephesians 5:18

¹⁷ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.

Hospitable—Literally translated “a lover of strangers.”¹⁹ This describes someone who is purposeful in pursuing relationships with people they do not know very well, including people who do not know the Lord.

A lover of good—A person who desires their lives, and the lives of those they lead, to reflect the Gospel; i.e. a “knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness.”²⁰

Self-Controlled—This word, one word in the Greek, appears several times in Titus. Five different times²¹ Paul uses self-controlled. He applies this over-arching thought to just about every area of life. It refers to a person who has “both a sober, sensible judgment, and a disciplined lifestyle.”²²

Upright—Describes the quality of interpersonal relationships.²³ This person loves other people well.

Holy—Describes the relationship of someone with God.²⁴ There is a consistent direction of obedience in their lives.

Disciplined—This is another reference to “self-control” but it is translated differently here. This Greek word is the same one Paul uses in the Fruit of the Spirit, which ends with “self-control.”²⁵

Hold Firm—Elders must hold firm to the Scriptures which are trustworthy, since they are from God and have been taught by God, the Holy Spirit, through the Apostles and Prophets. Furthermore, they are able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it.

This is incredibly important; the church and the Scriptures speak often of elders guarding doctrine.²⁶ As one commentator writes, “elders must not be chosen from among those who have been toying with new doctrines.”²⁷

Sober Minded—One who knows how to order his priorities and is disciplined. Describes someone who has sobriety of judgment.²⁸ He is serious about spiritual matters.²⁹

Respectable—The outward expression of inward self-control.³⁰ Describes a person whose actions and attitudes are characterized by self-control, and whose dealings with everyone are above reproach and exemplary.

¹⁸ 1 Timothy 6:1-10

¹⁹ MacArthur. Pg. 1821

²⁰ Titus 1:1b

²¹ Titus 1:8; 2:2; 2:5; 2:6; 2:12

²² Stott, John. Pg. 177

²³ Towner, Philip. *1-2 Timothy & Titus*. IVP. Downers Grove Ill. 1994. Pg. 229

²⁴ *Ibid.* 229

²⁵ Gal. 5:23

²⁶ 1 Timothy. 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 1:14; Acts 20:28-31; 2 Peter 2

²⁷ Towner. Pg. 228

²⁸ Mounce, William. *Word Biblical Commentary, Pastoral Epistles*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. 2000. Pg. 173

²⁹ MacArthur. Pg. 1785

Able to Teach³¹ —Describes one who is able to correctly interpret the Word of God and lead the church in rightly applying it. This does not mean that all elders, pastors, and overseers must teach in the same way or from the same “platform.” Some will be gifted at one-on-one teaching, while others will be gifted to teach more publically. Regardless of the venue, God’s under shepherds must be able to teach God’s people God’s Word so that they follow God’s way.

Gentle—Graciousness and forbearance describe the elders interactions with the flock.³² This person leads the charge and sets the pace for demonstrating grace and mercy within the church. He recognizes the grace and mercy that he has received and seeks to display and love others with that same grace and mercy.

Not Quarrelsome—Describes one who is not contentious. This person is not offensively aggressive.³³ He is not looking for a fight, nor ready to argue at a moment’s notice.

Not a Lover of Money—Church leaders should be motivated by the Gospel and compelled by Christ’s love, not money. The love of money is a characteristic of false teachers.³⁴

Not a Recent Convert—This word describes one who has been “recently planted.”³⁵ This person is not one who has just recently repented of their sins and trusted in Jesus. Elders, pastors, and overseers are to have a long established pattern of obedience. This is both for the care of the flock and the man.

Well Thought of by Outsiders—The character of a pastor and lay leader should be above reproach to the degree that no one is surprised that a local church has recognized their Christ-likeness and willingly submitted to their authority. Co-workers and neighbors should not wonder what a local church is doing in recognizing a man as an elder. His character at home and in the work place should publically confirm what is true about his ability to lead the flock that Christ purchased with his blood.

These qualifications are given to the local church to protect the local church. As Paul wrote in Acts 20, elders are to watch themselves and the flock. If correctly used, these qualifications become an invaluable tool for the group of elders to watch over themselves, one another, and the church body.

Women Elders?

Before we consider what New Testament elders do, we need to consider whether elders are only men or if men and women can occupy this office of leadership within the local church. Much disagreement exists across the landscape of Evangelicalism today regarding this issue and it is not our intention to be contentious or disagreeable; simply biblical.

³⁰ Stott. Pg. 95

³¹ This is the characteristic that is unique to overseer when compared to the qualifications of deacon.

³² MacArthur. 1786

³³ Kent, Homer Jr. *The Pastoral Epistles*. Moody Press, Chicago. 1958. Pg. 132

³⁴ 1 Timothy 6:1-10

³⁵ Stott. Pg. 98

In seeking to be biblical, we *must* recognize that Jesus, the New Testament authors, and the example of the early church greatly affirms the importance and significance of women. The culture that the New Testament was written in was a Patriarchal one that in many ways degraded women; and yet the consistent testimony and written instruction in the Scriptures is affirming of women.

To this end we see Jesus speaking clearly against a cultural understanding of marriage that allowed men to divorce their wives for whatever reason and elevating a woman's position in society by acknowledging that she was also held accountable for divorcing her husband.³⁶ We also see women play a prominent role in Jesus' ministry and announcing his resurrection. Regarding the former Mark tells us that in chapter 15 verses 40-41 "*There were also women looking on from a distance [at his crucifixion], among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.*" It was also three of these women that went to the tomb early Sunday morning to anoint Jesus' body with spices only to find that he had risen.

The very fact that women are recorded as the first eye witnesses to the resurrection is an indication of their importance, significance, and honor amongst the New Testament writers. To conclude that the Bible devalues, degrades, or denigrates women is a gross misunderstanding of what the Bible actually says. From beginning to end, the Old Testament to the New Testament, women are honored, cherished, and beloved by God even though men may at times fail in doing so.

To best understand the issues related to an all male eldership, we need to consider these matters in regards to the biblical teaching of headship. Headship is the biblical responsibility and authority that God has given men as the head of their homes. We are told in Ephesians 5:23-25 "*...the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church...*" While the purpose of this paper is not to elaborate on marriage we need to note some very important truths. The relationship of a husband and wife is likened to the relationship of Christ and his church. Wives are to submit as the church submits. Husbands are to love *just as* Christ loves.

Christ does all things well and his love for the church is not an oppressive or degrading love but a self-giving self-sacrificial love for he is the church's Savior. For the church to submit to Christ is a joy because of who Christ is and how he loves. In turn, for a wife to submit to a husband who loves her like Christ is equally a joy because of who her husband is and how he has been loved by Christ.

This model for male headship in the home is then applied in the church. In 1 Timothy 2:12-14, the Apostle Paul writes, "*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.*" Paul's reference to Genesis 3, the created order, and the temptation of Eve is of great significance. In Genesis 3, we see the serpent undermining the God ordained, and sinless at this point, role of headship that Adam had been given. Satan's attack on the human race and against God came in the form of an attack against marriage and the God-given responsibilities Adam and Eve were given.

³⁶ Mark 10:1-12

To be fair, Adam failed big time and did not depend on God for the strength he needed to lead his wife well in that moment. Rather than gently leading her away from temptation and depending on God's strength, which he had unrestricted access to, he sat passively by watching his wife be led astray and then followed suit. So while both Adam and Eve have guilt to bear, we need to note that it was Satan's strategy to attack God's created roles within the marriage relationship. A point Paul now applies to the church and the reason why he does not permit a woman to have authority over a man.

It may be helpful at this point for us to also now consider what "have authority over" means. Does it mean that a woman can't pass an offering plate because she has just handed something to man? Does it mean that she can't sing with the praise team because she is leading a man from the platform? Are women missionaries allowed to share about their ministries from the pulpit or not? Can women be greeters? Many more questions like these can and should be answered as the phrase "have authority over" is considered.

It is our conviction that this "authority" refers specifically to the office of elder and the functions of this office. God has given the care, guarding, protecting, teaching, and shepherding, of his church to qualified men who are to do those things. If then the authority that Paul speaks of is only this office of elder, women are allowed to function in *any* other office of leadership within the church. If the qualified men who have been made elder's by the Holy Spirit are leading well they will, seek to honor, uphold, celebrate, and utilize women and their gifts in every possible way that does not conflict the Scriptures.

So can women pass the offering plate?...yes. Can women serve with the praise band?...yes. Are women missionaries allowed to share about God's work in their mission field?...yes. Can women be greeters?...yes. These and every other area of ministry that is not a function of the office of elder can be done by women and women are greatly needed in these areas. Just as it was "not good"³⁷ that Adam was alone in the garden it is not good if a local church does not recognize the need for women to actively be involved in ministry and the gifting and empowering of the Holy Spirit so that they may be effectively active in ministry.

What do New Testament Elders Do?

The function or task of elders is now where we turn our attention. What exactly do these paid and non paid elders do?

To answer this question, we must again focus our attention on Paul's instructions to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, and his instructions to Titus. Furthermore we must consider what Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11-12 and what the Apostle Peter writes in chapter five of his first epistle along with the authors of Hebrews and James.

In Acts 20:28-31a Paul writes, "*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. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert...*" Here we see the beginning of a job description emerge.

³⁷ Genesis 2:18

Elders are to pay careful attention, to both themselves and the flock, care for the flock and be alert. Both the verbs that are translated “pay careful attention”, and “be alert” are written in such a way that Paul intends for elders to continually pay attention to themselves and the flock and to be continually alert. The wolves are coming and they are to be alert. As good shepherds, they are to guard the flock from attack (disciples being drawn away).

In Titus 1:9-10 Paul writes, *“He [an elder] 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. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.”* Here we see protection in the way of rebuking those who contradict sound doctrine, and the proactive responsibility of elders to teach and instruct what is trustworthy and sound doctrine.

In Ephesians 4:11-12 the Apostle Paul writes, *“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”* In these two verses, we see that he [Jesus] has given gifted persons to his church and that there is a specific reason for this. These gifted persons are given so that the saints may be equipped for ministry and that the body may be built up. While shepherds (pastors, elders, and overseers) are not the only group of gifted persons listed in verse 11 we do see in verse 12 that there is a specific purpose to their role in the church body.

The Apostle Peter writes in 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: 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. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”* According to Peter, a fellow elder, elders are to shepherd the flock; willingly and eagerly exercise oversight; and be exemplary in their conduct towards the flock rather than domineering authoritarians.

The idea of shepherding that Peter writes about should draw our attention and focus back to what Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. Shepherds guard and care for their flocks. They lead them well and lead them in ways that are best for them.

Oversight by elders is to be exercised willingly and eagerly. Today in America this function of oversight looks very different for today’s church than it did for those Peter wrote to. Today elders have a biblical and legal obligation to make sure the church is being led in a way that follows all applicable laws and best practices. The list of specific areas this applies to is vast and critically important for the local church. Also important is that men should not be force or coerced into being elders. Their pursuit of the office of elder should be willing, eager, and of their desire.³⁸

Elders are also to be exemplary in their conduct. The flock should see their under-shepherds, acting like the Chief Shepherd, and desire to emulate their behavior. While in our society rules and orders are handed down by bosses and managers, elders don't hand down rules to subjects, they lead by example and one day they will give an account for their leadership. Their lives are first and foremost characterized by a desire to glorify God by being disciple making disciples. Elders are servant leaders, as their Lord was a servant leader who came “not to be served but to serve and give his life

³⁸ 1 Timothy 3:1

as a ransom for many”.³⁹ This further enhances then the reasons why qualified men are to be elders rather than just anybody.

Hebrews 13:17 furthers the understanding of elders giving an account by stating, “*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.*” Elders, therefore, give an account for their leadership and keep watch over souls.

This is an incredible weight of responsibility that elders have been given and a weight they are not intended to lift alone. Their leadership of the church must be dependent on the Lord for his grace and mercy. Elders are to be pace setters in drawing near to the throne of grace so that they may find grace and mercy in their time of need⁴⁰; which, given the responsibilities they have is always.

Lastly, In James 5:14 we are told that if anyone is sick they can call on the elders to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of Jesus. Thus another function of being an elder is the caring and anointing of the sick.

A combined list then of the responsibilities of Elders is as follows:

- Continually pay attention to themselves and the flock
- Care for the flock
- Be alert and on guard for wolves who want to devour the flock
- Rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine
- Teach and give instruction in sound doctrine
- Equip the Saints
- Build up the Body of Christ
- Shepherd (same word as care in Acts 20:28) the flock
- Willingly and eagerly exercise oversight
- Be exemplary in their conduct leading by example
- Keep watch over people's souls
- Pray for and anoint the sick with oil in the name of Jesus.

Local church elders have been given to the church to guard and protect the church, to train the church, and to shepherd the church. These men are gifts from Jesus Christ to his Bride so that she may grow and mature. These qualified men have been given a monumental task of leadership and one that is not ever intended to be pursued alone. Together, as a plurality, they seek the Lord for his strength and grace needed to lead well.



GRACE

³⁹ Mark 10:45

⁴⁰ Hebrews 4:17