

## **THE WORK OF ELDERS (1 Timothy 3:1)**

### **I. ELDERS ARE TO OVERSEE THE FLOCK**

- A. Two times this responsibility is specifically stated of elders in the Bible.
  - 1. Acts 20:28a
  - 2. 1 Peter 5:1-2a
  - 3. The Greek word is episkopos - also translated by the word "bishop" in reference to elders (1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:5, 7)
- B. Definitions:
  - 1. Literally: from two Greek words meaning "to peer over"
  - 2. Strong: superintendent
  - 3. Thayer: a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done are done rightly (responsibilities, resources, freedom, and accountability)
- C. Another term used of elders is "steward."
  - 1. Titus 1:7a
  - 2. Definitions:
    - a. Strong (3623): a house distributor (that is, manager), or overseer
    - b. Thayer:
      - 1) The manager of a household or household affairs, especially a steward, manager, superintendent
      - 2) One to whom the household or proprietor has entrusted:
        - a) The management of his affairs
        - b) The care of receipts and expenditures
        - c) The duty of dealing out the proper portion to every servant
  - 3. Two points:
    - a. This word notes his position as an overseer.
    - b. It also emphasizes his accountability to Jesus Christ as the owner of the church (Acts 20:28). The bishops of the local church need to remember that Jesus is also referred to as a Bishop in 1 Peter 2:25.
- D. The important thing here is that the elders "over" see.
  - 1. All the affairs of the church must be on the table in their view.
  - 2. If they become too involved in one or two things, they could miss other things that are supposed to be watching over (e.g., money matters, specific committees, or a particular work).

### **II. ELDERS ARE TO WATCH FOR SOULS**

- A. Hebrews 13:17
- B. Definition of "watch:"
  - 1. Strong (69): to be sleepless, keep awake
  - 2. Thayer: to be sleepless, keep awake, watch
  - 3. This duty was to be first manifested in their home (1 Timothy 3:4-5)
    - a. His obligation is to "take care" of the church of God.
    - b. How do we know he can do this - because he took care of his own house?

- C. The elder is viewed as being positioned over the local congregation and watching every member thereof. He is not to sleep on his watch.
  - 1. Faithfulness or unfaithfulness
  - 2. Proper use of talents
  - 3. Sin in one's life
  - 4. Predators from without and within
  - 5. Fulfilling one's responsibilities in the proper fashion
- D. To do this, elders must have systems in place:
  - 1. Attendance check
  - 2. Active visitation program
  - 3. Active deacons
  - 4. Church discipline
- E. Again, the Hebrews penman notes that elders will give account of how well they watch for the souls of the members (Hebrews 13:17).

### III. ELDERS ARE TO SHEPHERD THE FLOCK

- A. The Greek word for this duty is "poimen." It is translated "to feed" in Acts 20:28 and "feed" in I Peter 5:2.
- B. The definition:
  - 1. Strong (4165): to tend as a shepherd
  - 2. Thayer:
    - a. To feed, to tend the flock, keep sheep
    - b. To rule, govern, nourish...to supply the requisites for the soul's need
- C. There are numerous duties encompassed in the role of shepherding:
  - 1. They must know their sheep (John 10:2-3a).
    - a. Elders need to know every member.
    - b. New elders will have to spend much time at first getting to know every member of the body.
  - 2. They are to lead the sheep (John 10:3b).
    - a. The sheep are not to be out in front.
    - b. The shepherd has the vision. He knows where he wants the flock to go and he leads them in that direction.
  - 3. They feed the flock (1Peter 5:2a).
    - a. The food should be the pure, unadulterated Word of God.
    - b. Bible classes, the pulpit, gospel meetings, the bulletin, all need to be filled with the Word of God because the sheep must eat.
  - 4. They are to seek the lost sheep (Luke 15:4).
    - a. Note the words, "If he lose one of them."
    - b. Go after that which is lost.
  - 5. They are to protect the flock.
    - a. David protected his sheep from the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 17:37).
    - b. The shepherds of the local congregation are to protect the sheep from the false teachers (Titus 1:9).

- D. In the book of Ezekiel, the shepherds who failed to fulfill their duties were reprimanded severely by God (Ezekiel 34:2-10).
- E. In I Peter 5:4, we learn once again that the elders are accountable for their shepherding.

#### **IV. ELDERS ARE TO LABOR IN WORD AND DOCTRINE**

- A. 1 Timothy 5:17
  - 1. Labor
    - a. Strong (2872): to feel fatigue, by implication to work hard
    - b. Thayer: to grow weary, tired, exhausted, to labor with wearisome effort
  - 2. Here, Paul says that their labor is to be in word and doctrine.
    - a. Elders are to be diligent students of the Word of God (Ecclesiastes 12:12).
    - b. After laboring in the Word, they are to teach it to others (1 Thessalonians 5:12).
- B. This duty is also hinted at in the qualifications of elders. They are supposed to be “apt to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2).
  - a. This means they are to be skillful in teaching.
  - b. To do this, they must be students of the Word.
- C. When one studies church history and beyond, he reads of the writings of uninspired men in the Second Century who are called “Church Fathers.”
  - 1. Clement of Rome – bishop of Rome
  - 2. Irenaeus – bishop of Lugdunum (Gaul)
  - 3. Polycarp – bishop of Smyrna
  - 4. Ignatius – bishop of Antioch
  - 5. Papias – bishop of Hierapolis

#### **V. ELDERS ARE TO BE EXAMPLES**

- A. Two verses:
  - 1. 1 Peter 5:3
  - 2. Hebrews 13:7
- B. Their character and behavior are to be such that the members of the local congregation can pattern their lives after them. Those who do should be able to follow them into heaven.

From a sermon by Victor Eskew.