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Why Elders?

The primary purpose of this book is not to show that elder-led congregations are the biblical norm. There are a number of recent books that do this admirably. If that is your purpose in picking up this volume, then please refer to the annotated bibliography at the end of this book where some of these books are referenced. However since this book purports to be a presentation of the biblical data concerning elders, it is important to demonstrate first off that the case for elder-led congregations is biblically sound. To that end, this chapter will provide a condensed presentation of the biblical/theological basis of church leadership by a plurality of elders. Once this is established, the book will then go on to describe the elder himself and then after that his role and finally his practice.

The chapter will be broken out in the following three sub-sections:

1. The Picture as it Unfolds: A review of the New Testament's developing presentation of the establishment and use of elders within local churches.
2. A New Testament Priority: A presentation of the high regard the New Testament places upon the place of elders and elderships in the life of congregations
3. Why More than One: A discussion of the advantages and need for having a plurality of elders for the promotion of spiritual vitality in the local church.

This chapter will be the most theological section of the book. Each successive chapter, though not non-theological, will tend towards becoming more practical in nature, each building successively upon the previous. Using the analogy of a building, this chapter serves as the foundation; the next two sections "The Elder" and then "His Role" are like the first and second stories built upon that foundation. The final chapter titled, "His Practice" is like the roof, in the sense that it completes the structure to make a useful whole.

The Picture as it Unfolds

Christ's promise was to build his church, not to send it from heaven fully assembled. The church is not a "pre-fab" building but built piece by piece. The incarnate Lord didn't lay out to the apostles a detailed picture of what a mature church would look like. That picture gradually took form via the power of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the apostolic church builders.

Focus on the Apostles as the Leaders

The earliest picture of the very young church in Jerusalem shows the apostles being very involved giving leadership to that congregation. Indeed, the first act of the young congregation was to fill the apostolic leadership void left by Judas' departure (Acts 1:12 – 26). Over the first five chapters of Acts the focus is upon the leadership of the apostles in Jerusalem and especially that of Peter. Because of their prominence within the fledgling group, it is they who were singled out for persecution by the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:17, 18, 27ff). They took the heat because they were recognizably the leadership of the group at that point.

In chapter six, we see that it was the apostles who show leadership in dealing with the practical problem of the care of widows. That leadership took the form of delegating to the congregation the task of choosing seven men to oversee the task of widow-care (Acts 6:1ff). In chapter eight, it was the apostles who sent John and Peter to Samaria to investigate the work of God that had broken out there (Acts 8:14ff). It was to the apostles that Paul was brought by Barnabas and accepted by them as a true believer and co-worker (Acts 9:27ff).

In those early years the Jerusalem congregation looked solely to the apostles as their leaders. However as the circles of Peter's and the other apostles' ministries grew wider, their day-to-day involvement in the leadership at Jerusalem began to be supplemented and replaced. By

the time Peter travels to Joppa and Caesarea, this transition may have already begun since his itinerating work would not have allowed him to attend to the day-to-day issues of leading a congregation.

Transition to Elder-led Congregations

In chapter 11 of Acts (starting at verse 19), the whole focus of the book begins a transition away from a focus upon Jerusalem and Peter toward focus upon Antioch and the missionary endeavors undertaken by Paul. This shift of focus is coincidental with the emergence of other leadership besides the apostles. The first intimation of this shift is seen when the Jerusalem Church sends Barnabas and not one of the Twelve to Antioch to check out the reports of a new work of God amongst the Gentiles there (Acts 11:22).

At Antioch, there existed the first named congregation where no apostle was involved in the founding. The founders were those chased out of Judea by the persecution that arose after Stephen's martyrdom. As the church prospered under Barnabas' leadership Paul (then Saul) is brought on board to help deal with the challenges that a rapidly growing work bring (Acts 11:25, 26). How providentially ironic that a congregation started because of a persecution that Paul had spearheaded, should later be the beneficiary of Paul's giftedness as a teacher.

We have no mention of elders over the church at Antioch, but we do have mention of men who functioned in ways that we associate with the office. Barnabas and Saul were among a group of men who functioned as the principal teachers of the church (13:1). They acted as the church's representatives when they sent off the gift to the impoverished Jerusalem saints (12:25). They filled this role again at the council in Jerusalem (15:2). So even if Luke does not record the title "elder" with reference to the Antioch congregation, it is evident that Barnabas, Saul and other men in that congregation were filling this function.

At the next mention of the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:30) we find the *first* recorded reference to elders as leaders within a church. Through a process unspecified, elders had been installed at Jerusalem to give oversight to that church. The obvious implication is that these elders had then been recognized leaders of the Jerusalem congregation for some time. If Paul's first missionary journey can be dated to A.D. 48 then the installation of a council of elders at Jerusalem would have been some time prior to this. It wouldn't be pressing the point to think that by A.D. 45 these elders were in place and functioning as leaders.

During Paul' Missionary Travels

The next explicit mention of elders occurs during Paul and Barnabas' church planting mission to Asia Minor. As they planted each congregation, they were careful to appoint over each, men designated to be elders (Acts 14:21 – 23). This appointment was part of their ministry of "strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith" (verse 22). They deemed that the best way to see that the congregations remained strong was for them to put into place elders.

There is no recorded developmental phase through which Paul and Barnabas went before they adopted this model. It appears full flower here in the first recorded official church planting missionary effort. As such, it was apparently an intentional and planned activity on their part. This is further indication that elder-led congregations had by this time become a normal practice in the churches. Paul and Barnabas didn't invent a new leadership structure, they simply implemented that with which they were familiar and which they knew would best serve the spiritual needs of these fledgling congregations.

The next mention of elders takes us back again to the Jerusalem congregation (15:4) where they are presented as key decision makers along with the apostles during the council held by that church. It is important to understand this event was not an inter-church council. Its decisions were not made in order to be binding on all the churches. It was a council of the Jerusalem church, convened to hear a complaint

about the improper teaching and the bad influence of some of its members upon the church at Antioch. The Antioch delegation of Barnabas and Saul requested action on the part of the Jerusalem congregation against these men and their teaching to heel. As such we can understand why the decisions made at that council were properly those of the elders of the Jerusalem church since it concerned the behaviour of its own membership

Significantly, James, an elder of the Jerusalem congregation, gives voice the decision that this council rendered. He said "It is my judgment, therefore that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God" (15:19). This decision was rendered to govern the comportment of Jewish Christians of the Jerusalem church. They were to cease and desist from what they were teaching and doing and leave the Gentile believers at Antioch and elsewhere alone. The letter sent back to the Gentile congregations from the Jerusalem church in effect apologized for the unauthorized behaviour of its membership (15:24) and asked only that the Gentile believers be careful to refrain from immoral and idolatrous behaviours (15:28,29).

As Paul, along with Silas revisited the churches of the province of southern Galatia planted on the first missionary journey, the decision of the council is communicated to those congregations for their encouragement. Even though the letter was not addressed specifically to them, it would have strengthened the message of his Galatian epistle, which may have already been written by this time¹.

The next explicit mention of elders by Luke is in Acts 20 where we read of Paul's tearful farewell to the elders of the Ephesian congregation. This meeting transpired at the tail end of Paul's third missionary journey as Paul hurried to travel to Jerusalem in time for the feast of Pentecost. Consistent with the two previous explicit references to functioning elderships (Acts 14 and 15), the picture is of a single congregation overseen by a plurality of elders. Some conjecture that

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* in *The International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p 323

the Ephesian church was really the group of house-churches² created as the product of Paul's ministry in that city, each of which had its own bishop. However, that is an argument from silence and is inconsistent with the previous examples already cited of the Jerusalem congregation and the congregations of southern Galatia. There, clearly single congregations were lead by multiple elders.

We would hope that the church at Ephesus was a large one. The fact that Paul dedicated his largest block of ministry time to it suggests just that. A large congregation, if it did exist there would necessitate an organizational structure and leadership distribution among numbers of men. They may even have had the original small group organization structure to assure adequate pastoral care to all its members. But that no more necessitates the existence of multiple congregations each with its own bishop or pastor than is the case for many contemporary mega-churches where small groups are formed, each with a responsible elder as leader, but all within the umbrella of a single congregation.

This example from Acts 20, at the end of Paul's third missionary journey, along with the example of the other congregations drawn from Paul's first journey forms bookends around his practice as documented by Luke. The inevitable conclusion is that this represents the norm for his church planting practice. At the beginning and the end he leaves congregations with installed elderships with the responsibility for the oversight of the churches established through his ministry.

The Epistles

Also within the timeframe of Luke's chronicling of Paul's ministry, Paul wrote to a number of the congregations established through his ministry. As would be expected, within them he occasionally made reference to the leadership present in their midst. On his second missionary, he ministered briefly (Acts 17:1 – 9) in Thessalonica. To this weeks old congregation, he exhorted the believers to "respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you" (1 Thess 5:12). Although not expressly named as

² Add citation here.

elders, the description of the function filled by these individuals is consistent with the wider New Testament teaching on the elder's role. The participle "who are over" that Paul uses here is the same word used twice in First Timothy to describe the elder as a man who ably manages his family (3:4) and as "those who direct the affairs of the church" (5:17).

Later, while under house arrest at Rome Paul penned his epistles to the Philippians and the Ephesians. Philippians was addressed to the saints of that congregation and also to "the overseers and deacons" (1:1). Notice again, it was to elders (plural), that he wrote to the church (singular). Then when writing to the Ephesian congregation, he tells them of the various person-gifts that Jesus bestowed upon the church. In addition to apostles, prophets and evangelists, there is also the gift of "pastors and teachers". These two nouns share a common definite article in the text and lead commentators to conclude it describes a single office³. This being the case, it is properly interpreted as the shepherd-teacher⁴. The term "pastor" or "shepherd" is the noun form of the verb with which Paul exhorts the elders of this same Ephesian elders urging that they "be shepherds of the church of God" (Acts 20:28). Later in the book we will discuss the role of the elder as a teacher of the Word. Suffice it here to indicate that this verse brings together two of the prime functions of the elder, that of a shepherd and that of a teacher. So even though the title "elder" is not used here, this gift of "shepherd-teacher" is definitely that required by those who occupy the elder position. To the Ephesians, who received more teaching on the subject of elders from Paul than any other congregation, the gift of this "shepherd-teacher" would unmistakably be associated in their minds with their own elders.

Beyond the duration of Luke's chronicling of Paul's ministry in the book of Acts, we also have the final documented references to Paul's

³ W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* in *The Expositor's Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 330

⁴ Phil A. Newton, *Elders in the Congregation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005) p.

practice with respect to elders. One is contained within First Timothy and the other with his epistle to Titus. Paul wrote First Timothy following his release from his incarceration at Rome. Timothy was then ministering at Ephesus. To him Paul gave his most extensive body of teaching on the subject. We will look that this teaching at later points within the book. Note here, once again, that he speaks of elders, plural (5:7) as those who lead in the church, singular.

The last documented itinerate missionary journey of Paul that we know with certainty was to Crete with Titus as his co-worker. Paul left Titus there to, in Paul's own words "straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). How long that missionary tour took, we do not know. Certainly long enough to have them preach in various towns and to see significant numbers converted in those towns. Crete was a decidedly less urban environment that was typical of Paul's previous ministry contexts. His labours there were in towns, not cities. Nevertheless, in each of these small centres, where a congregation sprung up, a council of elders was necessary so that the church planting cycling could be deemed complete. Only when that was done could Titus leave Crete to rejoin with Paul in his labours.

Summary

What we have seen is that from the first Christian congregation at Jerusalem to the last ones established on Crete, the consistent picture is of congregations established with a elders put in place to lead them. On a couple of occasions (Antioch and Thessalonica) where the office of elder is not named, the tasks performed are the same as those assigned to elders. Wherever the leadership is named, it is universally identified as a plurality of elders over single congregations. Whether the location is a large urban centre, such as Ephesus, or smaller towns and cities such as in southern Galatia or on Crete, the uniform description is same. Although the story that unfolds is of an ever-widening influence of the gospel, the leadership model never changes. From start to finish, the consistent portrait of local congregations is that they are under watch care of a plurality of elders.

A New Testament Priority

This is a book about and for elders. But if it was a topic to which the scriptures did not attach significant value, then a whole book on the subject hardly seems worthwhile. We have already seen that elder led congregations were a consistent feature of the expanding influence of the gospel in the first generation of the church. This section will show additionally that the position of elder is presented a very positive manner and as a vital aspect of healthy congregational life. To do this we will look at three key passages. They are 1 Timothy 3.1, 1 Peter 5.1 and then 2 John 1 and 3 John 1 together.

A Good Work

“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his hear on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.” 1 Timothy 3:1⁵

Three times in the first epistle of Timothy we find the phrase “a trustworthy saying”. Each one is used to introduce an idea upon which Paul desired to lay special emphasis. In the third use Paul adds the emphatic “and deserving full acceptance” to emphasize more strongly that here is a point not to be missed. The use of the saying provides a simple framework within which he gives his exhortations to Timothy in this epistle.

The first and third usages are attached to repeated doctrinal elements in Paul’s teaching. The first in 1.15 is attached to the purpose of the Jesus’ incarnation (compare Titus 3.4 – 8 where it is used similarly). The third usage is attached to the superior and lasting value of godliness as over against physical fitness. Paul’s use of the same saying in 2 Timothy 2.11 is attached to a strong call for faithfulness to Christ amid a backdrop of persecution.

⁵ All biblical citations are from the New International Version

The second use, our text, in First Timothy 3:1 points out the high esteem with which Paul held the office of overseer. The saying provides his introduction into a lengthy description of an overseer's and then a deacon's needed qualities, spiritual and moral. So important in Paul's mind is this topic that he introduces it with the same formula with which he introduces his discussion of the other passages just noted. A discussion of church polity would seem mundane; but apparently not to Paul. To him the appointment and of elders as leaders within the church is a discussion that ranks alongside that of key points of doctrine and spirituality.

The task of elder Paul says is "a good work". This is a simple enough attribution. There is nothing flowery in the designation. Indeed, the role, in its original designation, had none of the exalted overtones that came to be attached with the office of "bishop" as it came to expression in later centuries. There were no vestments, no elaborate ceremonies, no trappings of power and no social standing associated with it. Indeed, you might get the impression that if anything Paul is polishing up the position so that more men would be willing to take it up. It was after all a "day of small things"⁶. The only thing Paul could promise anyone who assumed the post was sweat, tears and perhaps blood (their own).

Anyone who has laboured in the context of a small work knows there are many hardships to be born by those who assume a role of oversight. Disappointments are many. Encouragements seem few and far between. Occasions for second guessing agreement to take up the task would have come regularly. The Christians of that day laboured in a cultural context where Christ was virtually unknown. Christianity, if known at all was considered either as a sect of Judaism or as a personality cult loyal to a man said to have lived and died in a far away place. The difficulties for believers were exponentially greater than those we know in twenty-first century North America. The closest

⁶ We read Acts and the epistles with our mega-church awareness and forget that many of the congregations within which Paul ministered consisted of dozens of believers not the hundreds or thousands that we might imagine.

approximation in our times is the situation of the missionary trying to appointment of elders over a young congregation that is struggling to hang on in a sea of suspicion and antagonism from the surrounding non-believing community. The ferocity of opposition to the gospel in some parts of the Islamic world today gives us some approximation of the barriers that were faced. By this comparison, we understand why Paul gave the topic the priority within First Timothy and Titus that he does. The installation of quality leadership would be vital to the survival of those congregations.

Given the hardships attendant upon assumption of the role, it is understandable that he doesn't paint too rosy picture of the role as glamorous or grandiose. It is simply "good". Modern English translations render *kalos* as "noble" (NIV, NASB, ESV), "honourable" (NLT) or "good" (NKJV). This designation should not be taken as attributing exalted status of the one who occupies the office of elder. This might be a draw back of translating it as "noble" lest it imply that it "ennobled" the office bearer himself. Paul's focus in this verse is on the work, not the worker. My own preference is be with the NKJV rendering of "good" in order put the spotlight on the nature of the work and away from the suggesting any exaltation of the man.

The conclusion is that Paul is commending a desire to do this "good work". He doesn't exactly put it that way, but the implication is that a good work, sought for the right reasons in order to be done according to the biblical pattern is a worthwhile aspiration. If sought aright, it is no seeking after office or human recognition or praise. It is a desire to engage in necessary labour for the good of the local body of believers and for the glory of Christ.

Elder to Elder

"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder" 1 Peter 5.1

The NIV omits the key word *oun* (“therefore”) from the beginning this verse. Its presence in the text binds the exhortation to Peter’s preceding warning of an impending judgment⁷. This is an unfortunate omission in the NIV because it obscures the urgency of Peter’s appeal. The preceding context is that of the readers’ experience of suffering for Christ on the one hand and the promise of a purging chastisement from God upon the church on the other. The exhortations of chapter five are in response to the solemn tone of the latter verses of chapter four.

As a pre-eminent apostle, the easiest thing to say would have been: “I the apostle of Jesus do exhort you”. These words no doubt would have been received as authoritative. But his appeal here, at a critical juncture in his letter is instead very personal and heart to heart. He addresses them not on the basis of what distinguishes him from them but on the basis of what makes them the same, namely their shared experience as an elder within the church. In this he demonstrated extraordinary wisdom as a leader. Those to whom he wrote were besieged for their faith. They suffered for Christ and would have been tempted to apostatize in order to gain relief from that suffering. Without a doubt, compromises were already being made; else Peter’s warning of judgment would have been over the top. Being under the gun, they didn’t need to be berated by “head office” but to be encouraged by one who was empathetic regarding their circumstance. Peter recognizes this and comes alongside them to encourage them on in their important work.

The point to garner from this passage is Peter’s recognition that in hard times, the work the elder is vital for the survival of the church. He gives a reminder that to them has been entrusted the soul-care of the members of their congregation. I imagine that nothing he says to them

⁷Wayne A Grudem, *1 Peter* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1988, p 185. Grudem indicates that Peter is borrowing the language of Ezekiel here to raise the ante of the importance of his exhortation. He says “The connection is: since purifying judgment is beginning with God’s house, and especially with the leaders of God’s house, there *I exhort the elders among you*”. Italics are his.

is novel. But elders, like everyone else can lose perspective when things get tough. They too need to be reminded of their role, especially when the pressure is on.

The consequence of a failure of leadership has far wider ramifications than the failure of one of the rank and file, because it leaves the rank and file bereft of the benefit of the superintendence they need. This is doubly so when difficulties are widespread because of persecution. If the leadership fails, then the other believers become easier prey.

Finally, Peter bolsters his exhortation to his fellow-elders with a carrot. He encourages them by reminding them that both he and they have a wonderful prospect ahead as a reward for faithful service. “When the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Ptr 5:4). Interestingly, he sets this hope of heavenly jewels against a warning against earthly greed. The work of the elder is so important that it offers a great, albeit delayed reward. Yet the opportunities that come along with it tempt the elder to settle for more immediate gratification. But to take his eyes off the prize threatens not only loss of that prize but also the ability to do his work well or at all.

John, the Elder

“The Elder” 2 John 1; 3 John 1

Even as Peter appealed to others as an elder, so also John ministered in his epistles from his role as elder. Unlike Peter, he didn’t even identify himself as an apostle in his epistle’s introduction. He preferred instead to be identified simply as “the elder”. He had become so identified with the office and role in the minds of believers under his care that he didn’t need even to state his name. They knew automatically who it was that wrote them. Conversely, he had so closely associated himself

with the role in his own mind that he used it to identify himself rather than “apostle” or even more significantly “the beloved disciple”.

The reasons for this preference are not stated and it is unimportant here to speculate about them. Important for our purpose is that in the relationship John had with his readers, he was first of all “the elder”. So thoroughly had he imbibed this role in his interactions with them that it came to be used of him in the same warm sense that we frequently refer to the full time minister as simply “pastor”. As such, we see in this a pattern worth imitation. Elders should embrace the office and role so thoroughly that it becomes for them part and parcel of their personal identity. Conversely, parishioners should be able to naturally associate the role with the man holding the office in an unforced way. Seeing this achieved will be a hoped for fruit of the project

That an apostle should prefer the title elder to that of apostle tells us that the position is a noble one and well worth seeking. Paul called it “a good work”, Peter readily identified himself with others who had taken up the role. John became so identified himself with the role that it came to be synonymous with his own identity

Summary

We see that the New Testament presents a vivid picture of the role of the elder in ways that is both positive and warm. Only good things are said about it or about those who labour diligently to fulfill the responsibilities it brings. The New Testament portrayal is not of a sterile job done by career professionals but of a calling that men embrace so thoroughly that it becomes part and parcel of who they are and who others see them to be.

It is presented as a very important role within the church. Its proper functioning is assumed as necessary to consider a congregation complete and equipped to stand on its own. Moreover its influence is regarded as vital in times of distress.

Why More than One?

The 1689 London Baptist Confession of faith indicates that officers consisting of both elders and deacons should lead a congregation.

A local church, gathered and fully organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members. By Christ's appointment the officers to be chosen and set apart by the church as called and gathered, are bishops (otherwise called elders) and deacons.⁸

This quote illustrates that having multiple elders over a single congregation was a practice among Calvinistic Baptists going back to their emergence from Puritanism in England in the seventeenth century. The recent popularity of this model is apparently not a new thing among Baptists, but a resurgence of a practice that has been a part of Baptist congregations for over three hundred years. In fact, the disappearance of the practice among Baptists in the twentieth century may be more the exception than the rule.⁹

Why then have more than one elder to lead a congregation? Are there strategic advantages to this model? More than that is there a compelling necessity for the practice?¹⁰

⁸ *The 1689: A Faith to Confess* (Liverpool: Carey Publications, 1986), p 57

⁹ Phil A Newton, op cit., see his chapter "Why Baptist Elders Is Not an Oxymoron", in his book *Elders in Congregational Life*.

¹⁰ There is the obvious necessity of conformity to the Scriptures. If a plurality of elders is the biblical pattern, this is reason enough. But the Scripture very rarely command an action without also giving an abundance reasons why what it presents is also needed if the church is to prosper spiritually.

In his book “Biblical Leadership”¹¹ Alexander Strauch names three strong reasons for leadership by a council of elders. First it is a way to mitigate weakness of any single leader by the complementary strength of others. The adage “there is strength in numbers” is not just a saying but also a substantial reality. Second it shares the burden of leadership work between or among several individuals. Pastor burnout can be reduced or eliminated by the proper functioning of this model. Third, it provides a natural form for leadership accountability to peers. So many scandals occur where the pastor or leader is aloof from peers who can watch over his spiritual state and prevent a fall into sin.

Mark Dever in his book “The Deliberate Church” suggests an additional six advantages to having a plurality of elders.¹² First and similar to Strauch’s first is that it balances off pastoral weakness by adding to it the strengths of the other elders. Second, it spreads the burden of congregational criticism among the entire eldership, making it easier to bear. This is incredibly important when unpopular decisions need to be taken. A group can withstand an onslaught of criticism where a single man may give up before seeing a matter through. Third, it enlarges the pool of pastoral wisdom upon which the leadership may draw. Fourth, it builds leadership from within the church, making it far less dependent upon a pastor brought in from outside. Fifth, its strength facilitates the process of discipline. Elders operating in unison in this matter are better able to see this difficult area through to its end. Sixth, as a result of having an indigenous leadership, it reduces adversarial attitudes between the congregation and the leadership. It is not “us vs. him”, since there is only just “us”.

In addition to these reasons given by Strauch and Dever, I would suggest the following as additional compelling reasons for leadership by a plurality of elders:

¹¹ Alexander Strauch *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth, 1995), pp 40, 41

¹² Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), pp133 - 135

1. As elders work together in harmony they show the congregation how Christians can maintain and foster Christian unity. Since a principle fashion by which elders lead is through example, the demonstration of Christian unity among the elders serves as a microcosm of the unity that should exist throughout the congregation.
2. The Eldership constitutes a natural prayer community. Since praying is a primary responsibility of an elder, the elder meetings are the obvious context within which an elder's praying receives direction, impetus and practice. That prayer life is to extend to his private prayer vigil on behalf of the congregation.
3. The collective memory of the eldership serves to keep the church true to its core values and important distinctive beliefs. A single leader, especially a younger one or one brought in from outside does not have that resource to aid him. Intentionally or not, the single leader can easily veer away from these values. An eldership has the inertia of cherished traditions that are not easily overcome. This better maintains continuity with a positive and biblically aligned tradition than is possible by a single pastoral leader.

The wisdom of having a plurality of elders is not difficult to see. To be candid however, we must admit that there are also drawbacks. For example, it is sometimes inefficient as a decision making body or as an instrument for getting things accomplished. This is especially so when an eldership, apart from the pastor, is composed entirely of laymen. The busyness of their lives outside of their duties as elders is an obstacle to sustained cooperative action.¹³ A single leader can

¹³ This has been reflected in our experience at Trinity Baptist Church. Moving forward with proposed changes to the constitution or the adoption of new policies is slowed down by our individual preoccupation with home, family and work. The times we have for elder duties are consequently focused upon issues of the moment to the neglect of more strategic decisions.

frequently act more decisively in a crisis situation than can a council of peers. Additionally, if an eldership develop inertia going down a wrong, even heretical path, that inertia is more difficult to overcome than in the case of a single leader. Similarly, if a single member of an eldership should fall into sin, the loyalty that naturally forms toward other members of such a close functioning group may lead the group to wrongly deny the seriousness of that elder's sin. The good quality of loyalty can be a hindrance to taking the disciplinary measures needed to recover this sinning member.

So then, we need a stronger basis for choosing this model than simply a statement of its practical advantages. For every practical advantage we could conceivably raise a corresponding disadvantage. If we found the disadvantages outnumbered the advantages, solely on the basis of practicality, we might abandon this model. Fundamentally, we need to opt for this model because it is a decidedly biblical one. The first piece of establishing this has already been laid in our examination of the descriptive biblical passages already cited. Clearly a plurality of elders was the uniform practice of the earliest church. Following on in step with that biblical pattern is in itself sufficient reason for our adoption of this biblical pattern. But there is, I believe, more than just a pattern to be followed. There is also a necessity to this pattern that should be understood.

As we probe deeper into the proper functioning of the elder as described by Scripture we see that it is necessarily done within the context of a plurality of leadership. There are elders, plural because their work, when properly done, is a cooperative one. This is shown in the most common biblical metaphor for the elder's work, namely that of a shepherd. Our modern conception of the shepherd leads us to think of it as a solitary task. But the shepherding that took place in the biblical world was anything but solitary. Shepherding was a cooperative effort that was performed by teamwork. As I write this, it is just a week away from Christmas. Already we have sung the carol "While Shepherds Watched their Flocks" in preparation for the season. That text from Luke chapter two describes the common practice of

shepherds working together to protect their flocks. Shepherds pooled their resources, (their eyes, their ears, their knowledge of sheep their experience, etc), in order to provide the required level of protective care that could not be possible if conducted individually or separately. Indeed, given the nature of sheep and the absence of fenced in pastureland in that setting, it was work that could not be done singly.

It is no accident that the Scriptures liken people in the church to sheep¹⁴. They frequently display some of sheep's more unfortunate tendencies to stray, to get in trouble and fall victim to their enemy. Protecting, directing and correcting them are major challenges. For the same reason that real shepherds need to cooperate to care for sheep, so church leaders need to cooperate in order to properly care for the people in a congregation. This being the case, a plurality of shepherding leaders is not just a nice to have, but also a requirement for seeing the job done to the standard God requires.

Whenever God chastised or warned the leaders of His people, it frequently is the shepherds, plural He rebukes (Jer 23:1; 50:6, Eze 34:1ff). Likewise, in the New Testament, the leadership responsibility and accountability for the welfare of the congregation is corporate (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2; Heb 13:17b). Corresponding to this, the people are exhorted to exhibit a proper responsiveness to leaders, plural and not to a leader, singular (1Th 5:17; Heb 13:7, 17a; James 5:14). The watch that leaders keep over the souls of people is a group watch. It requires the cooperation of the group to be done properly and well. But it is a single work in which all participate. Consequently then the Lord will judge the failure of the group as a whole should they neglect their watch.

Repeatedly we see the pattern of leaders being appointed as a group. Aside from the replacement of Judas, the appointment of leaders singly,

¹⁴ Jim Van Yperen, *The Shepherd Leader* (St. Charles IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2003), see Chapter 1: A Look at Shepherding, pp 1 – 31.

is unknown.¹⁵ Every case of decision-making we know of or addressed to leaders of congregations is made to a group, never to a single named leader. Even Paul's charges to Timothy and Titus were not to solitary men who pastored churches but to men who served as Paul's delegates within his church-planting teams at various locations and their mission was uniformly to install shepherd leaders, plural over a congregation.

The inevitable conclusion is that a plurality of elders forming the spiritual leadership of a church is both greatly advantageous and necessary. It is a great advantage because of the strengths that cooperative action affords. It is necessary because the nature of the task, as described by the New Testament has collective action in view. This is why it is universally described in the context of a group. In a later section of this book titled "His Role" I discuss the nature of the elder's work in detail. That discussion will show more clearly how this work is properly done as elders work together.

¹⁵ Even this case proves the rule, since Matthias was added to the apostolic group and was not a law to himself.

The Elder

The church is built upon the foundation laying work of the original apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). The growth of the Christian faith during their life spans is nothing short of astounding. By the time they had all passed off the scene, Christians numbered in the tens of thousands, churches had sprung up in every corner of the Roman Empire, and all of the books that constitute what we call the New Testament had been penned and circulated freely among the churches as the authoritative Word of God. A very telling indication of the rapidity and size of this growth is that Christianity was already considered threatening enough to make Christians the object of fierce bouts of persecution. Such great results belie the humble origin of the movement and the very ordinary qualities of the men who constituted the apostolic band. We need to go back to the Gospels to be reminded just how unpromising the apostles really were. None were high born. None, with the exception of Paul had what we would call a good education. None had extraordinary wealth or power by which to influence those in power to regard the movement favourably. In every respect, they were just run of the mill men. Yet, by the power of the Spirit, using the Word of God, they laid down a solid foundation on which the church still rises century upon century two millennia later.

The apostolic role has been completed and so the office no longer exists. The role that elders fill in no way measures up to that of the apostles. It is a far humbler station that they occupy. If we likened apostles and elders to Olympic runners, then apostles were the 100 metre sprinters whose ministry blazed across the Roman world. Elders on the other hand are like long distance runners whose ministry is unspectacular and plodding, but designed for the long haul.

Despite the lowly nature of the elder's role, many think that an elder is a man of a different quality from the rank and file man in the pew. But if apostles were just ordinary men, elders certainly are not to be seen as having higher origins than they. The common element between the

apostle and the elder is that both are Spirit led and equipped. The apostolic ministry succeeded because God's Spirit empowered it. The elder's ministry will succeed only insofar as the elder is led and empowered by this same Spirit of God.

This section will shine a light upon the elder as an "ordinary" Spirit filled man who has a recognizable set of spiritual aptitudes (of character and of gifting), who carries himself with a certain spiritual demeanor and who has been set apart to a specific spiritual role. His worthiness for the post lies not in himself but in God who "makes us competent" (2 Cor 3:6).

The purpose of the section is to discern the spiritual profile of an elder that is recognizable from the New Testament. This profile consists of these elements: (1) a sinner saved by grace (2) a man (3) a man under authority (4) a man of integrity (5) a man who is both in and under control (6) a man of recognizable moral and spiritual character (7) a man of the Word and finally (8) a man of spiritual maturity. I will discuss each in turn, examining the biblical materials that underpin each. At the end, I will conclude with a presentation of the spiritual profile considered as a whole. None of the elements are optional and it is only as they all function together that we understand properly who the elder really is.

One: A Sinner Saved by Grace

I have already made a point of emphasizing that elders are ordinary men. That term "ordinary" must be expanded to emphasize the acknowledgement that elders are sinful men. All are sons of Adam, who being born are constituted sinners from conception onward. They are born under wrath as enemies of God. Only as God's grace comes to them do they come to have standing before God. Elders, just like every other saint have this standing through faith and even that faith is God's

gift to them. In this respect, an elder is exactly like every other Christian.

Once converted, these men, just like every other believer receive spiritual giftedness, aptitudes, life opportunities and responsibilities for ministry within the church. These are sovereignly bestowed and providentially orchestrated. Again, in this respect elders are exactly like every other believer. All of these things are from God and should be no cause for pride or differentiation between Christians.

Elders, like all Christians, continue to live in a sin-cursed world. Although they are saved, they, along with every other believer still wait for their final salvation. In the mean time, elders experience the same limiting factors, as do all other Christians. They too feel the debilitating affects of bodies that are aging; succumb to sickness and will die. They too err out of ignorance with the same frequency as other Christians.

Importantly, elders also manifest the same propensity to revert back to the sinful behaviour patterns that marked their pre-Christian status. The three enemies of every Christian; the world the flesh and the devil, are the enemy of the elder as well. Consequently, elders, just like every other Christian must wage exactly the same battle against sin in their lives, as does everybody else. They have the same requirement to put sin to death in their lives upon them, as does every other Christian. It is no easier or harder for them to do so.

There is a false perception that surface from time to time that suggests that elders are a different class of saint than others. It implies that spiritual leaders have some kind of status that exempts them from sin's influence and consequently from the need to do battle against it. As this perception takes hold in the mind of an elder, it will have the following deleterious consequences;

1. It will make him careless of his own soul and an easier victim for Satan's attack.

2. It will make him proud, thinking he is above the experience of the “ordinary” saint. As this attitude takes root, it sows the seeds of an unbiblical understanding of sainthood as constituting a higher plain of existence where sin’s attacks either cannot reach or are somehow more easily repulsed.
3. Perhaps worse of all, it will make the elder unsympathetic to the plight of his fellow believers. As this happens, he loses his ability to identify with their struggles and to have compassion upon them in these struggles.

The result of this misperception is that his capacity for ministry is actually diminished; which is opposite to the expectation of those who promote the view. The elder’s ability to fulfill his role depends critically upon his own continued consciousness of his position as a sinner who must depend continually and whole-heartedly upon God for sustaining grace for the survival of his own soul and for the effectiveness of his own ministry. This was the attitude of the apostle Paul with regard to his apostolic labours. He believed his competency for ministry as a thing that God graciously bestowed: “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God” (2 Cor 3:5).

Additionally as this false perception of an elder’s spiritual superiority takes root it has the following affects within the people of a congregation:

1. They may despair thinking that there is a level of holiness for the elite but not attainable by them. Hope they might have of dealing with the sin in their lives is diminished since they think that grace to deal with it is not so much for them but for the spiritually elite class called elders.
2. They may assume that holiness of the elder will suffice for them. This cuts the nerve of sanctification. If the elders pleads my cause, what need is there then for my own personal striving after God.

In either case, the elder's ability to direct a believer into a path of godliness is hampered by that believer's assumption that it isn't applicable to their experience. This is the root of the sacerdotal tendencies and views that has plagued the church for much of its history. But Baptists should not assume that this view is absent from their congregations. People are by nature given to sloth. They will naturally push off on to others responsibilities that belong properly with themselves. This includes the need to strive after godliness. Further, as we see more and more people in pews that come from un-churched backgrounds, we should assume that this is the view that they will bring in the door with them, because this is universally the view of man-made religion.

An elder is rightly viewed as a man who should be frequently at prayer. What is perhaps understated is that a large part of his praying needs to be for himself. This sounds selfish but in the light of the need for the elder to keep a firm grip upon his position as a sinner who stands and ministers only by grace, it comes to be seen as imperative. His essential ability to be of benefit to others absolutely depends upon him remaining in this state of conscious dependence upon grace.

A Man

The elder doesn't perform his role in a vacuum. He labours within a context of existing personal interactions that occur within a local church. Among those interactions the familial relationship is the most common and the husband-wife relationship the most important. A congregation consists, by and large, of a collection of families. This is not the whole make up of the church. There are significant numbers of solitary members; those who are single, widowed, divorced or participate apart from unbelieving spouses and family. They must not be discounted. But it is undeniable that the single most important segment of adult members is the married couple. As elders minister, their ministry has as its largest focus, the support of the marriage bonds and familial relationships of its members. Consequently, the most

typical location for the elder's labour is the living room of church families.

In that ministry to families, the elder seeks to promote a biblical perspective of proper familial relationships; first between a Christian husband and a Christian wife and second between Christian parents and their children. In that context of instruction, the elder must be someone who is representative of the biblical teaching about these relationships. If elders, by who they are or what they believe represent something that undermines that biblical teaching, they cannot be successful in seeing these biblical ideals promoted through their work. Their labour would be hypocritical and ineffectual.

As much as the present western mindset might object, it is clear that the Scriptures describe familial relationships as having a decidedly hierarchical component. Without equivocation, the Scriptures state "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3) and that the appropriate attitude of the wife within this context is submission to her husband as an act of submission to Christ (Eph 5:22). Further, children are to be submissive to parents and obey them as their act of loyalty to Christ (Eph 6:1). This is not an isolated or obscure aspect of biblical teaching. It is repeatedly a topic of discussion within the New Testament epistles (see also 1 Cor 11:34, 35; Col 3:18 – 20; 1 Pet 3).

That the topic comes up repeatedly within the epistles indicates that it is an understanding of relationships that has always run contrary to the unbeliever's way of thinking¹⁶. As husbands and wives were converted in that first century (as well as in the twenty first), they had to be reoriented in their thinking and behaviour as it concerned their

¹⁶ Douglas Moo, *What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?* in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, eds. John Piper & Wayne Grudem, (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2006), p.181. Moo contends that false teachers at Ephesus "were encouraging women to discard what we might call traditional female roles in favour of a more egalitarian approach to the role relationships of men and woman".

relationships to one another. Since the original sin, men and woman have rebelled against it and continue to do so down to our day. Our own age then is not unique in its rejection of this view. Ever since Eve listened to Satan instead of her husband and Adam listened to his wife instead of God, the sinful heart throws off the biblical view as an act of defiance against God.¹⁷

An elder's function is to promote the biblical arrangement of headship and responsibility. Their desire must be to see Christ honoured by all within a household, to see the husband assume his position as head of the home, to see the wife acknowledge and support her husband in that position and to see children live in obedience to their father and mother.¹⁸ Who they are as an elder, must be in harmony with the ideals they are seeking to see established.

A woman cast into an elder's role of authority in the church over the family, including that family's husband, represents by her gender, a repudiation of this basic biblical understanding of headship and submission within that family. An elder enters a home as a designated spiritual authority over the members of that household with a mandate to promote the biblical hierarchical view. An elder speaks in front of the children and the wife to the husband with the expectation that the husband and all the family will receive this instruction and submit to it. The Scriptures instruct Christians: "obey your leaders and submit to their authority" (Heb 13:17a). However, a woman in this role

¹⁷ Years ago, a female colleague who was to be married asked me help her find biblical texts to be read at her wedding service. I pointed her to Ephesians 5:22 – 33. She refused it out of hand because she rejected the authority of her husband over her. Of course her fundamental problem was that she rejected the authority of Christ upon her life.

¹⁸ It is understood that each of these roles is to be exercised in a fashion that is honouring to God. A husband is to love his wife sacrificially and tenderly; the wife is to submit gladly and wholeheartedly. Parents are not to be overbearing or harsh, but make their unconditional love for their children manifestly evident to them. All are to do these things as acts of love and devotion to Christ. Without these in view, then the biblical model is incomplete and becomes an illegitimate excuse for excess or abuse.

countermands the very instructions of Scripture she purports to uphold. Her words may say that the man is the head of the woman, but by virtue of her being a woman in a position of spiritual authority over a man, her actions erode the principle of male headship that she has been designated as elder to promote.

Sadly in practice, when women elders have been accepted by a congregation it is because the authority of the Scriptures has already been downgraded. Having refused to yield to the basic biblical understanding of male headship within the family, that church has no problem with putting a woman into roles that give spiritual authority over men. In such contexts a woman is not expected to support or promote the biblical teaching of male headship. Consequently there is no inconsistency with her assumption of an office of spiritual authority over men.

If we are to look to one biblical text that definitively gives us clear instruction on this subject, then we need to look at First Timothy 2:11 - 15. In this epistle Paul gives back-to-back instruction to the church; first for conduct within worship (chapter 2) and second for the appointment of elders and deacons (chapter 3). The transition between the two topics are Paul's straight forward declaration that he does not allow women to assume positions that would see them give instruction to or exercise authority over men. "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man" (2:12). Paul could hardly be any clearer. It is a statement without equivocation or qualification of any kind. Yet, because it is a statement that offends the egalitarian mindset of our day, many attempts are made to obscure its clear meaning or to put cultural qualifications around it that would alleviate our responsibility to abide by what the text teaches.

In support of his strong statement Paul looks to the original pattern God instituted in the creation of mankind. To justify male headship Paul states "for Adam was formed first not Eve" (verse 13).¹⁹ By reference

¹⁹ It is significant that Paul commonly elicits support from an Old Testament event when he wants to draw a strong theological lesson. Two other notable

to the pre-fall creation order, Paul clearly establishes his instructions on this subject to be supra cultural. Before there was sin, before there were established cultural mores, before there were patriarchal or matriarchal patterns of authority, there was the establishment of this principle of male headship. So for Paul, God's decision to create the man first was wrought with practical implications; first for the marriage relationship (the man is to be the head of the wife) and second for the local church (where men are to be in the position of spiritual authority). In his mind there cannot be discontinuity between the two without incurring consequences that would be harmful to both.²⁰

examples are 2 Cor 3:7ff where he asserts the glory of the New Covenant to be greater than that of the Old and Gal 4:21ff where he similarly demonstrates the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old.

²⁰ A text that illustrates the practical interplay of these two spheres is 1 Cor 14:34, 35. Here Paul also forbids a woman to speak out the general congregation, but instead "be in submission" and to ask her husband about it later while at home. Her submission in this text relates to both the congregation and her husband. There is much that is difficult about this passage; especially since Paul has just indicated that there is a legitimate place for women to pray and prophesy within the church (11:5). D. A. Carson believes that Paul is restricting women from weighing in on discussions about the meaning and significance of prophecies that have been given. He says: "Paul has just been requiring that the church in Corinth carefully weigh the prophecies presented to it. Women, of course, may participate in such prophesying. That point was established in chapter 11. Paul's point here, however, is that they may *not* participate in the oral weighing of such prophecies. That is not permitted in any of the churches." He goes on to indicate that this text then is a specific case of the clearer injunction laid down in 1 Timothy 2:11 – 15 that women not teach or have authority over men. He says "More broadly, a strong case can be made for the view that Paul refused to permit any woman to enjoy a church-recognized teaching authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11f, and the careful weighing of prophecies falls under that magisterial function"⁴⁴

. See D. A Carson, "Silent in the Churches" in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: CrossWay Books, 2006), p.151,152.

It is inappropriate to think that this is a pattern that has been eclipsed, since it is the pattern for Adam and Eve in their perfection. It is presented as the ideal from which they fell. Consequently Paul continues in his argument from the first parents showing that the first sin involved a rejection of the fundamental headship – helpmate relationship that God had placed Adam and Eve in. Eve’s deception was not due to her gender, as if women are more easily duped. It was due to her rejection of her position under Adam. She bought Satan’s lie “you will be like God” (Gen 3:5) and came to believe of eating the fruit that it was “desirable for gaining wisdom”. Consequently, being misled, she no longer saw her need to consult her husband before she acted. As such she serves as a poor model of the behaviour that Paul urges namely that women “learn in quietness and full submission”.

Paul concludes with a word about a woman’s hope for salvation as “through childbearing”. Paul doesn’t mean that giving birth is the vehicle of a woman’s sanctification. It is instead a reference back again to the original rebellion of Eve and the curse pronounced by God upon Eve and womankind: “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children” (Gen 3:10). Paul is simply stating that the original curse (that afflicted both the man and the woman) can only be reversed by the means appointed for all persons, namely “if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety” (1 Tim 2:15b). If Paul had been speaking of men he might of said they would be saved “through the sweat of their brow” to indicate the same curse under which both Adam and Eve came under. The salient point for our discussion is that God has made provision for the reversal of Eve’s and then Adam’s repudiation of the hierarchical relationships into which He had placed them.

This passage by itself is sufficient to circumscribe the office of elder as belonging only to men. In the first place, it forbids women to do those things that quintessentially define the elder’s role namely to teach and to exercise authority over the congregation. An elder is primarily a teacher of the Word of God within the congregation. Everything else he does flows from this fundamental function. If it is inappropriate for

a woman to perform this function over men, then they cannot properly occupy the office. An elder is secondarily one who acts authoritatively within the congregation. The primary instrument of that authority is by his teaching of the Scriptures; so these two are closely bound together. Again, if it is inappropriate for a woman to wield authority over men of the congregation, then having a woman in the office is biblically untenable.

Secondly, this passage precludes woman from the eldership because it is Paul's introduction to his teaching to Timothy on who is an appropriate candidate for the office. The deliberate sandwiching of passages make it unthinkable that a congregation can honour the authority of the Word of God in First Timothy 2:11 – 15 and also think it appropriate to accept a woman for the office believing it consistent with the teaching of 3:1 – 7.²¹ Without a doubt, Paul uses his teaching of 2:11 – 15 that delimit a woman's teaching and authoritative function as a natural segway into his instruction regarding church leaders within the congregation.

A Man Under Authority

Hebrews 13:17 speaks of leaders' accountability within the Christian community. Although these leaders are not explicitly called elders, my conviction is that elders are in view by the author. No other named group within the New Testament function to "keep watch" over other believers (compare Acts 20:28). Even if elders are not explicitly or exclusively in view, certainly elders are leaders within the congregation and so the accountability thrust upon leaders by the passage apply equally to them.

²¹ At minimum, First Timothy 3:1 – 7 assumes the male identity of the elder candidate. I would contend that it also precludes a woman, because of the importance placed upon the need to be effective in the role of head of the home as proof of his ability to give oversight to a congregation. Again, according to the Scriptures, this is a role only suitable for the husband.

Leaders in the Church will render account to Christ Himself for their comportment. The church is His and he will insist upon a full audit of the actions of those who purport to give direction to it. It will be a reckoning to assure that what they have done has been faithful to His Word and that it has been done with diligence so as not to squander the opportunities that have been afforded them. Paul warns Timothy along this vein in his final exhortation to him urging “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim 4:2). Paul enjoins faithful and diligent proclamation upon his spiritual son. Note that he gives this exhortation against the reminder of Christ’s role as judge (verse 1). Timothy was urged to a diligent fidelity to the Word and its proclamation with the understanding that Christ will require of him an accounting of his actions as a leader within the church. The same accountability rests upon all who assume a role of leadership in Christ’s church.

James in his epistle (3:1) warns against lightly assuming the teacher’s mantle. This influential privilege brings with it a stricter accounting, lest by slovenliness or deceit, the teacher lead any of his students down a path that leads away from the truth (and God). The old adage about teachers is that they “learn twice”, once at their desk as a pupil and then again as they review, prepare their lesson and teach others. To teachers is given an understanding of the material they teach that surpasses that of most others. If a teacher misinforms learners under their charge, the probability is good that it is done against better knowledge. That is to say, they wilfully mislead. Even the world rejects such a thing as wrong.

Once again, the backdrop of the New Testament leadership is the Old Testament image of leaders as shepherds. The neglect of their responsibility as the nation’s watchmen brought harsh words of condemnation by the prophets. (Jer 23:1ff; 25:34 – 36; Eze 34). The nation’s shepherds namely: kings, priests, prophets and community elders who neglected the care of the people under their charge, were rightly judged by God in the severest of ways because of this. They

and their progeny were cut off from the covenant. Similarly, shepherds of the New Testament community of faith, are warned that they also “must give an account” (Hb 13:17) of how they discharge their duty.

This accounting will be at the judgment throne of Christ. In the intervening time, elders must render accountability to God through the mechanism of their fellow elders. Paul urged the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20) to “keep watch over yourselves” (verse 28) as a safeguard against the emergence of “savage wolves” (verse 29) from within their own company (verse 30). This exhortation to watch is directed to the group, collectively. An appropriate interpretation might read “keep watch over one another” because it points out that the shepherding role of elders is inclusive of elders as well as the flock. No sheep in the fold may be left untended. Elders who are themselves left untended, are deprived of the benefit of being asked the kind of probing spiritual questions that elders routinely ask the people under their care. The anticipation of having those questions posed has the beneficial effect of keeping people honest. They know they will be held to an accounting and it prods them in a right direction.²²

The benefits of such an arrangement are substantial:

1. It assures that the new elder will gain the benefit of the advice and experience of the more seasoned members of the council. This relates both to this elder’s spiritual health and the exercise of his role.
2. It encourages the elder to know that they are labouring as part of a team and not as lone voice.
3. It provides a mechanism by which an erring elder may be checked, corrected and if required, brought under discipline. Elders who have no accountability are brought to heel only

²² One man into whose home I have entered on a number of occasions, indicated his consciousness of this in a way I thought perceptive. He welcomed my visits because it let his children know that he considered himself under the spiritual authority of the elders. He was keen to replicate his own submissiveness in his children

after causing considerable disruption and harm within a congregation.

4. It assures the members of the congregation that no elder can continue to act unilaterally in a fashion that is harmful to them or that seeks to move them in a direction contrary to the core values of the congregation.
5. It encourages the congregation to know that a watch is set over the lives of those who watch over them. This gives them a higher degree of confidence in the level of care that they will receive from elders.

A concern with this arrangement is that elders may become a law unto themselves. They may watch over one another, but who watches over them? If an elder sins, can they be held to account for the sin by the one offended? Or, does the elder's accountability only lie with fellow elders, that is, is it the sole prerogative of elders to discipline elders? If this were the case, it would set up a situation where abuse of privilege became a decided risk. For whatever reason, elders could act protectively of one another and discount accounts of the sin of an elder and never take the required action.

Fortunately Paul does address the situation of an accusation of sin being brought against an elder from the membership. He says: "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses" (1 Tim 5:19). This text demonstrates that an elder can be called to account by non-elders for sin he has committed. However, by insisting on corroborating testimony, Paul sets a standard that will help to assure that spurious accusations are not brought forward and ruin the reputation of a godly man.

The background of this practice goes back to the Mosaic Law that states that the guilt of a person cannot be established on the strength of only one person's testimony (Deut 19:15). Jesus brings this principle to play when he lays down the definitive steps that must be followed when dealing with sin within the church (Matt 18:16). A sober reality

is that angry persons occasionally bring forward false charges of sin with the intent of inflicting hurt. People in a position of leadership are perhaps more vulnerable to this since they sometimes take actions with which people strongly disagree. These passages put protection in place that will minimize this abuse while still taking sin seriously and providing a mechanism for dealing with it. While there is protection against a false charge, an elder must understand that if he is accused of sin he will be dealt with by the same standard using the same process in place for all church members. In this, he is to be treated the same as everybody else.

Indeed, for the elder, the consequences of sin are doubly harsh since his ability to continue on in the office of elder may well be ended by that sin. Upon confession he is most certainly forgiven by God of sin for which He is repentant, but the ongoing consequence of sin in an elder's life is a spoiled reputation. Reputation and its vital importance to the elder's work is the topic to which I turn next.

A Man of Integrity

In real estate, as the saying is that the three most important considerations are: location, location and finally location. Similarly, with an elder a strong case can be made for saying that the three most important considerations are: reputation, reputation and reputation. Other things are also important and necessary. However, without a good reputation, an elder cannot do his work. This is because reputation is currency the elder has to spend in order to be able to perform his role. To put it crassly, it is the price of admittance into the trust that must be gained before anything worthwhile can be achieved in his labours.

Paul uses two different closely related even synonymous terms as introductory attributes in his list of an elder's character. They are "blameless", *anegkletos* (Titus 1:6,7) and "irreproachable" *anepileptos*

(1 Tim 3:2). These terms signify someone about whom there is not even the sniff of scandal. In the vernacular, their rap sheet is not only clean, it is non-existent. We all know of persons who, when their names are mentioned, automatically bring to mind events that are blemishes upon their reputation. This seems to be a very common phenomenon with political figures. Unfortunately within church circles, this is also far too common the case. As time passes, on this issue of reputation, it seems that there is less and less to distinguish the world's leaders from those in the church. The surprising thing is that along with this trend is an equally disturbing toleration within the church with this state of affairs. The only way to explain this is that the church is increasingly accepting the world's and not the Bible's measure of what makes a good leader. The wide spread indifference to the sexual improprieties of past President Clinton amongst United States citizens has a corresponding indifference to this matter of reputation within the church.

Paul extends the requirement of an impeccable reputation to outside the walls of the church. "He must have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (1 Tim 3:7).²³ This is a way of saying that his integrity is so undeniable that even colleagues, unbelieving family and friends with whom he has established relationships will acknowledge it. I don't think Paul is saying that unbelievers must be interviewed in order to determine a man's acceptability for the office. Instead he is indicating that any negative word that filters back to the church about a man from this circle outside the church is a signal that he may not be acceptable. I think it also means that a man should be sufficiently established within a church in order that his family, his friends and occupation be

²³ The meaning of the consequences that Paul envisions here are unclear to me; especially the phrase "into the devil's trap". At minimum, Paul is warning that such a man would be the wrong choice because of the negative consequences it would bring for him. It may be that he is thinking that such a man is immature and would become proud in the position but later suffer a calamitous fall.

sufficiently known to the church so that any such negative elements would come to light.

Paul puts this requirement of “blamelessness” at the head of both his lists. In so doing he indicates that it a very important, even foundational issue. If a question mark hangs over a man because of his conduct, past or present, then his candidacy for the post should be seriously questioned. If he fails this test, the other requirements cannot balance them out because trust is the context in which an elder’s work it conducted.

There is a tendency to downplay the importance of reputation; especially if the man has other obvious assets that would commend him for the role. For example, he may be exceptionally gifted as a bible teacher or evangelist. He may have great organizational skills or be very successful in business. The temptation is to believe these strengths to be invaluable assets that cannot be ignored. Not to use such a man would seem to be an enormous waste and poor stewardship of the gifted people God has given a congregation. This mindset can easily take hold within a congregation because it stems from a good desire to see the blessing of God on the church and to see it grow. But it is wrong headed because it neither relies upon God for that blessing nor honours God’s holy and righteous character in its tolerance of sin within the lives of its leadership.

In addition to all this, the uncritical acceptance of men of questionable reputation is foolishness. Leaders lead in the paths with which they are most familiar. Becoming a leader doesn’t change a person’s heart or mind. If anything, it confirms them in their conviction that they are ok as they are. Their natural tendency is to direct others into the behaviour and attitudes that they brought with them when they assumed the post. The leaven of a leader’s chequered past, if anything will spread through the whole group that they are leading.

Very importantly, if a church accepts a leader who has a known reputation for a moral compromise, the congregation that accepts that

leader is then tarred with the same brush of that sin. If an elder is appointed who is remembered because of an affair he had, or because of an incident of child abuse, or because of a shady business deal, then what the outside world believes is that this congregation thinks that such sins are not serious, or even condoned. The Gospel is itself offensive to the natural man. Adding to it the criticism of the world for the choice of leaders with less than blameless reputations is placing unnecessary, even insurmountable barriers in front of the message we wish them to receive.

The question inevitably raised then is: “can a man who was known to have fallen morally ever be accepted for the post of elder?” The answer to this question is found in the question, namely: what is the man known for? Is he known for the sin, or is he known for having repented of the sin? Someone has said, that when the repentance is more notorious than the sin, then, and only might such a man be legitimately considered for a role of leadership and the office elder.²⁴ Practically speaking this means the following:

1. A considerable amount of time (i.e., years, perhaps decades) must pass between the man’s initial repentance and the point when he may again be considered for the elder’s post. This delay serves two purposes. First, it allows for a substantial demonstration to the church that the repentance has genuinely taken hold in the man’s life and that the spiritual weakness that allowed him to succumb in the first place has been remedied. Second, it allows the community to see the man, not as a man who fell into sin, but as a man who has been recovered from sin and grown to spiritual maturity. In effect, such a man must be viewed as having started afresh in the faith. He must once more have progressed from being a babe in Christ to a state spiritual maturity. He must once again be seen to have consistent experience as one who successfully resists temptation to sin in his life.

²⁴ Find reference to Brownlow North’s life and notorious repentance.

2. It is possible that the memory of his sin may persist a long time within the church and permanently disqualify a man for a leadership role. This is not a criticism of the legitimacy of a man's repentance, but a manifestation of a real consequence that sin sometimes brings to a person's life. King David's sins of immorality crippled his ability to function properly as a father and the consequences within his household decades later were tragic even though no one would doubt the genuineness of his repentance. Some sins, by their nature persist in the memory of a community longer than others. This may seem unfair, but it is reality. If a good reputation is a man's 'caché' for gaining the trust needed to lead, then it may never be regained. If nothing else, such a situation should be a stern warning to all who lead of the dire consequences of betraying that trust!

A Man in and under Control

The thought revolution that came to expression in the sixties during the last century promoted a throwing off of the restraints that purportedly harmfully limit people's thinking and behaviour. The so-called sexually revolution is one expression of that thinking. "Free love" we know however, is just a euphemism for unrestrained sex with whomever and whenever wished. The real life consequence of it is now summed up by the acronym STD. Sexually transmitted diseases now infect, harm or kill many millions worldwide in a way totally unknown before this revolution came to expression.

Another expression of it is seen in the other recently coined expression "substance abuse". For the generation of my parents, the term was unknown. Abuse of alcohol was the only substance readily available to the general population that could be abused. Since the sixties, wide varieties of drugs that create powerful dependencies in the bodies of the users have become almost ubiquitous. The 24-hour pharmacy,

complete with a drive-through is now as common as the corner convenience store. Above and beyond this there is the huge illegal international trade in drugs and the violence that surrounds it. Countries like Afghanistan and Columbia support their economies by selling narcotics to a seemingly bottomless demand for their product within industrialized nations like Canada and the United States. Virtually none of this existed just a half century ago²⁵.

Meanwhile, alcohol is still as potent a vehicle as ever in destroying many lives while gambling becomes mainstream, as governments, to their shame, rake in millions from the huge appetites that people have for games of chance. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say we are a society addicted to sex, drugs, alcohol, gambling and entertainment. Yet we imagine ourselves to have thrown off restraint and to be free. The irony, if it weren't so tragic would be hilarious.

The point of this is that everybody is always under the control of something. That control will come either from a good and God honouring source, or from a bad and destructive source. Paul puts it bluntly when he exhorted the Ephesians to “not get drunk” but to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). Being under the control of some substance, like alcohol “leads to debauchery” Paul says. By contrast, a man under the control of the Spirit sees manifest in his life a multitude of positive consequences or fruits. This is a standard that Paul lays down for every believer. It isn't surprising then, that the same standard should be applied to elders, who are to lead by the example of their own lives.

In the two lists of elder qualifications this principle is seen negatively and positively. On the negative side, Paul indicates that the elder must not be an abuser of alcohol (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7). In our day, that injunction can be extended to mean that an elder must not be under the control of any substance or activity, be it alcohol, drugs, food to the

²⁵ Without exaggeration, a month does not pass without mention in the media of a major bust of marijuana “grow-op” in the greater Toronto area. As recently as five years ago, this was not the case.

point of gluttony, or gambling to name several. The list may change, but the principle is the same, namely; if a substance or activity controls a man to the point that the Spirit's influence is stifled, then that man is not fit for the post of elder.

Also in the list of negative controlling factors are undesirable behaviours. Paul indicates that an elder must not be a man who is prone to outbursts of anger nor of a contentious or combative nature. He says he should not be "violent but gentle, not quarrelsome" (1 Tim 3:3) and again in Titus, "not quick-tempered" and "not violent" (1:70). A failing more common in men than in woman is this proneness to outbursts of anger. In such instances, a man is no longer under the control of the Spirit but being controlled by his emotions. In such instances he is not only irrational, he is unspiritual and his conduct is offensive to God.

Such conduct is especially dangerous in the life of a church elder because of the unique position that he has to influence the lives of numbers of individuals for good, or for bad. If he is given to "righteous rage", he sets an example that may be replicated down the road in lives of a subsequent generation of church leaders. Not a few congregations have been ruined by leaders who are filled with this so called righteous anger and let their congregations have it on a regular basis. Those who are very young in the faith are also very susceptible to being damaged by an angry leader. If an elder deals angrily with babes in Christ, then he may crush the bud of faith and cause resentment to grow instead.

Christ's own example in this regard is very important. His healing ministry of mercy to the sick was rightly seen as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 42 concerning the Messiah when it said "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory" (Matt 12:20). And again, when his disciples denied access to children that were brought to him he said "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder the, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mk 10:15). Likewise the apostle Paul made a point of dealing gently with young believers at Thessalonica. While

there, rather than assert apostolic prerogative, he and his company were “gentle among” them caring for them “like a mother caring for her little children” (1 Th 2:7, 11). And again, among the Corinthians, Paul exercised tremendous restraint by not bringing down upon them the weight of apostolic censure in condemnation of their repeated resistance to his leadership and instruction. Instead, very patiently, he set before them the legitimacy of his leadership and the folly of their rebellion, warning them “as my dear children” (1 Cor 4:14).

In addition to controlling substances and controlling behaviours there is thirdly the need for an elder to be free from negative controlling desires. In Paul’s list, the sin of greed is the one he zeroes in on. He says that an elder should be a man who is “not a lover of money” (1 Tim 3:3). To Titus says he must not be “pursuing dishonest gain” (1:7). Inevitably, at the root of such corruption is the sin of avarice Peter similarly says that elders not to be “greedy for money”. As Paul indicates elsewhere “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” and that it can even lead to the shipwreck of a person’s faith (1 Tim 6:10). The lust for wealth is a serious sin in any believer because of this faith destroying potential. In the elder, it is doubly problematic because it can lead others who look to the elder for example into the same trap.²⁶

Another sin that can be a controlling desire, to which leaders especially can fall victim is a craving after power. Peter warns that an elder should not lord it over the people in the congregation (1 Ptr 5:3).²⁷ Paul

²⁶ I recently watched an investigative documentary that recounted the story of a con man who bilked dozens of churches of many thousands of dollars on the promise of a large return of money for a minimal investment. This con man was highly regarded as a spiritual leader. His greed was clothed in spiritual dress so he was able to lead many church leaders into his sin with a façade of a promise of doing great good with the great wealth that would soon be coming to their congregations.

²⁷ Peter was probably remembering Jesus’ instruction to eschew the power based leadership pattern of the world in favour of a service based leadership pattern (see Matt 20:25 – 28).

warns about being “overbearing” (Titus 1:7). Such behaviour is symptomatic of a person who wants to wield power over people and control their behaviour. The things that can foster such an attitude are pride or lack of faith. Pride can be the cause, because an arrogant heart will put others under them as subservient. Lack of faith can be the cause because the need to take charge and make things happen reflects disbelief that God will bring the increase without their personal intervention.

Paul sums all this up by saying that the elder should be “self-controlled” (Titus 1:8). Rather than being in the grip of harmful negative emotions, behaviours and attitudes, he must instead, by the power of the Spirit, be in charge of himself. This is a sign that he is a mature individual with a healthy emotional constitution. This notion then extends outward to his living situation and domestic relationships, where he must be a man who effectively manages his own life situation. This is most frequently manifest by his ability to manage his own household. Most men who assume the post of elder will be married and have children. Logically then Paul requires that an elder “manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (1 Timothy 3:4).

The home is the arena in which a man displays most tellingly whether or not he has the required aptitude for office of elder. It has two principle relationship interactions where this comes to light. These are his relationship with his wife and his relationship with his children. Paul focuses specifically on the relationship with his children and the man’s ability to elicit their respect and obedience. If these two things are missing then he is disqualified from the office. In Paul’s words “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church” (1 Tim 3:5)²⁸.

²⁸ I understand Paul’s statement of Titus 1:6 regarding an elder’s children to mean “children who are trustworthy”, indicating of good character that is the fruit of their father’s care over them. This is because set in contrast to their not being “wild and disobedient” and not in contrast to them being unbelieving.

The family is a microcosm of a congregation, where the husband is to exercise his appointed role as head of the home. The fruit of the exercise (or neglect) of that headship will inevitably be seen in the comportment of his children. As that headship is exercised consistently, wisely and lovingly, it is seen in the faces of children who love and respond to him as submissive children. Headship neglected or which is overbearing, is evidenced in children who are out of control or resentful of too heavy a hand upon them. Disobedient or troubled children are the warning signal that a man may not have the requisite oversight skills for the elder's job.

Paul doesn't mention the man's relationship to his wife in these passages. However, the abundance of teaching provided by Paul on the subject of how a man should conduct himself towards his wife indicate that it must be a part of the consideration (especially Eph 6:25ff). Unless he is a single parent, the man never relates to his children in isolation from his wife. Difficulty between a man and his wife will also show up in the behaviour of the children. They are a weather vane frequently indicating problems that are not immediately apparent.

Being a good husband and parent is not an ironclad guarantee that children will respond by being submissive and obedient. Children are, after all, sinners too. By and large however, if a loving father strikes a right balance between an overly controlling heavy handedness and a too laissez-faire approach, his children will be properly responsive. This to Paul is an indicator of a man who has the right approach that can be extended to the role of an elder. He can carry the same approach over to the work of an elder and will meet with the same positive responses from the people assigned to his care.

It is possible that a man's children may be extremely difficult by their very nature. Or, by dint of physical or mental disabilities a child may be extraordinarily challenging to rear. A father's priority in these situations needs to be his home. The responsibilities of being an elder may be too much of a burden to be borne along with the challenges he

meets in his home. While these children still remain a challenge, his candidature for elder should be carefully considered and perhaps postponed. Once those child-rearing challenges lay behind this man, he then may be an excellent candid for the post on the strength of the trials he has overcome in his faithful discharge of his role as a father.

Additionally, from time to time crises arise within families from out of the blue. As children grow into teens, the transition to adulthood sometimes brings with it serious and even frightening trials that can tax even the most resourceful and godly of parents. If those trials turn into prolonged problems in an elder's home, then that elder may need to step aside from his role as an elder in order to give priority to this challenge. There is no need to suggest that this man, or his wife has failed as parents. Serious issues arise even under the best of parental oversight. However, if the elder is to take Paul's instruction about managing his household seriously, then that may need to be his priority for a season. There is no shame in this. Indeed, it serves as a good example to other men of the church of the crucial need to give priority to home responsibilities as a basis upon which wider ministry may then be built.

A Man of Recognizable Moral and Personal Character

Although elders will differ widely in personality and traits (extrovert or introvert may both apply) yet, there is a discernable set of qualities, spiritual, moral and personal that should be seen in his life. Thus far, we have seen that an elder must be a man who has a spotless reputation, who understands how to be in submission to authority, who is self-controlled as well as being able to manage his own situation. These traits, while important, are fairly generic and are not necessarily of a moral or spiritual tenor. A secular leader would do well to cultivate the same qualities to get ahead in his professional or goals. However, the work of an elder is carried on in a different context than that of a

secular leader. That context, the local congregation, has objectives that are quite different than that of a secular institution. Since he has in mind the transformation of people into the pattern laid down in scripture, it is understandably that he himself must exhibit those characteristics in his own life.

A secular leader may understand the rightness of morality and even have a desire to see his employees become Christian and be filled with the Holy Spirit. But strictly speaking, these qualities are not vital to his business success. For the elder however, godliness in the lives of church member is the end goal of his ministry. If he discounts it for himself, then he can never expect to see it replicated in others.

The traits that the New Testament zeroes in on are: sexual purity, hospitableness, having a meek and gentle temperament as opposed being overbearing and argumentative; willing and eager, (especially in the discharge of his role). The vital importance of each is discussed next.

1. Sexual Purity (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6)

By insisting that an elder be “the husband of one wife”, Paul is calling men to a high view of sex and the marriage relationship. Similarly the writer of Hebrews enjoins that marriage should be honoured by a, and the marriage bed kept pure” (Heb 13:4). These passages speak against the age-old sinful trend to treat sex and marriage casually, in an easy come easy go fashion. Jesus spoke against this in his words of rebuke against those who would lightly put away a wife that displeased them: “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Mk10: 5 - 9). The elder must stand by his example against this trend. If he is not married then he must not be sexually active. If he is married, he must remain so to his current wife and be sexually faithful to her.

Behind this call to marital fidelity is the understanding that husband-wife union is meant to be an earthly type of the relationship that exists between Christ and the church (Eph 6:22 – 32). The ideal that the husband is to aim at is the exclusive, self-giving love that Christ has shown in order to procure our salvation. The relationship of husband and wife should remind us of that higher bond. This cannot not happen if a man has multiple wives (simultaneously or one after the other) or if he is not sexually faithful to the wife that he has.

Because an elder's life is to point higher than himself to Christ, an excellent example in this area of his life is of primary importance. The consequences to a church of tolerating an elder who is less than exemplary in this regard are large. Not only does it serve as a poor example but it also obscures the message that the church is trying to proclaim considering this mysterious union between Christ and His bride the church.

2. Hospitableness (1 Tim: 3:3; Titus 1:8)

The most common venue of an elder's work is the living room of church members. However, for ministry to be effective in the members' homes, those same members must also become familiar with the elder's own living room. An elder must have both the willingness and the ability to extend hospitality. By ability I mean that he be a sufficiently gregarious nature so as to allow people to get to know him. He must be willing to let people into his life and home so that people see him as he really is.

Previously I stressed the fact that an elder is a sinner who only stands by virtue of the grace that has been extended to him. If he really knows and feels this, he should not try and hide that fact from people in the congregation by keeping them at arms length. Instead, he needs to realize that frankness about his

sinfulness is a key to achieving a more effective ministry as an elder. By being hospitable, he allows people close enough to see this.

Hospitality also demonstrates to people that you genuinely care about them. If you never extend an invitation to your home to those you purportedly care about, then they are more apt to doubt the expression of your interest in them when you state it as you visit them in their home. Having experienced your hospitality, they cannot deny that care about them. That is one less barrier to overcome when it comes time to speak directly to them of their spiritual neediness.

The married elder has a natural asset in his wife for this aspect of his ministry. She can aid him superbly by helping to make their home an environment that is welcoming and where guests feel valued and at ease. This has little to do with her skill as a housekeeper and much to do with her graciousness in opening her home to the people in the church.²⁹ To do so, she must see the key value of hospitality to an elder's ministry and actively cooperate to see it achieved. My married experience backs this up. My wife Jackie is one of the most accepting and uncritical of people that I have ever met. Her graciousness and warmth has made my work, as an elder far easier than it otherwise would have been. People tolerate me, but they positively love my wife (and her cooking). Any invitation to our home is consequently always accepted.

The single elder is not exempt from this requirement of hospitality. Since he cannot look to a wife for support he will need to be more inventive and determined to be able to achieve the same objective. But on the other hand, the freedom his

²⁹ My own experience is that I felt far more welcomed and valued in homes where the wife paid more attention to the people in it than to making and keeping it spotless.

single life gives him may afford more opportunities to be hospitable than is the case for a married man (1 Cor 7:32).

3. Meekness (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7)

Like most Canadians, I enjoy the game of hockey. The common quip about hockey is that it is a prolonged fight during which, every so often, a game breaks out. At the very least, it is a very physical game that invites fisticuffs. Unfortunately, many congregations approach church like it was a hockey game. Part of the blame for this must lie with a leadership style that is oriented towards winning battles and in which leaders' egos get in the way of doing what is right and honouring to Christ.

Apparently, this is not a new issue since Paul instructs both Timothy and Titus to avoid men who are by nature, argumentative and combative and by personality overly domineering. He would not have given this warning unless he had personal experience of just such men and knew the harm that they can inflict upon a congregation. John, speaks of a certain Diotrephes "who loves to be first" and who exercised his authority in a heavy handed manner evening putting people out of the church with whom he had disagreements (3 John 9,10). Here was a man who apparently abused the authority his position of leadership gave him in order to promote himself and those who sided with him.

It is just because leadership positions are susceptible to the abuse of Diotrephes-like men, that Paul insists that leaders who are, by the work of the Holy Spirit known for their meekness. He doesn't use the term "meekness" in his lists, but the description is of a meek man. Paul says that an elder is "not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome". These are the qualities of

meekness. As the cliché says, meekness is not weakness.³⁰ It frequently takes great self-constraint to hold back from self-promotion and simply trust to God to work a matter out. Meekness is by nature gentle and eschews the use of violence (verbal as well as physical) to resolve a matter.

Since a church is full of people who care passionately about the things that have brought them together, emotions sometimes boil over. At times, things are said in the heat of an exchange that are regretted later. The elder must be a man who understands this and who will not “rise to the bait”, so to speak and react in kind to harsh or unfair accusations that are hurled his way. This only results in an escalation of words and a hardening of positions in a determination to win a fight. He instead must be able to respond with a calmness that will defuse tension and win a brother or sister by the refusal to vent angrily.

4. Willing and Eager (1 Ptr 3:2)

When is it time for an elder to step down? When the role is just a duty and no longer a joy. Peter exhorts his co-elders to their role “not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be”. The work of the elder is not forced upon anyone. Those who assume the role do so with the understanding that it is worthwhile work, worthy of their best effort. Indeed, one could argue that it cannot be done begrudgingly since willing service, Peter says, is what God wants. If it is attempted unwillingly, then it is not the role to which the elder has been called

³⁰ Meekness is mistaken for weakness because it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and consequently not seen or expected in men naturally. People expect leaders to be self-asserting and action oriented. But a meek man will refuse to act if the only action available to him is that which advances self-interest. He will instead wait for the opportunity to act where it will put Christ forward.

Nor is it to be done for selfish gain “not greedy for money but eager to serve”. Peter here speaks of money as an improper motive. But he might have also mentioned power or popularity as other possibilities. If the office is sought for reasons of personal gain, then that man can hardly fill the role properly since his ambition is at cross purposes with the example of service that he is called upon demonstrate.

Eager service is what the role demands. However, men can grow tired in the role. They can give years of faithful and willing service, but then becomes physically or emotionally worn out. This may happen apart from any sin in his life. He may just need a break! This reason alone is probably sufficient for having a policy of elder rotation or sabbaticals in place. Men must be allowed to step out of the role for a time so that they can recharge and regain the original zeal with which they first assumed it.

A Man of the Word

The elder must be able to communicate scriptural truth with conviction in a clear fashion. As Paul says of the elder he must “be able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2). He may be better known as an evangelist or as a personal counsellor or for organizational acumen. However, the ability to ably teach the Word is the one ability that all elders must possess. This is essential to the work of the elder because his primary tool in the discharge of his role is the Scriptures.

In his instruction to Titus Paul says that the elder “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute others who oppose it” (1:9). This one sentence tells us a lot. It assumes that the elder has himself been well taught in the Scriptures and that he believes them to be true and binding upon himself. We colloquially say, “He has a grasp of the

subject” to indicate someone who is knowledgeable in a specific field of study. Paul says the elder must have a firm grasp of the gospel message. But he means more that just being well versed in the Scriptures. He means someone who holds to the conviction of his beliefs against those who would separate him from them. The context of the following verses indicates that heretical teaching was already being disseminated within the churches on Crete. Elders are key to the protection of congregations against it, but they themselves, must first of being solidly rooted in the Word so that they are not led astray and the congregation with them.

In the next chapter of this book we will look at the role of the elder. In it we will see that the elder functions to direct and to protect the congregation. This verse in Titus sums this up nicely when it says the elder is to “encourage by sound doctrine” (the directing function) and “refute others who oppose it” (the protecting function). We see by this passage that the Scriptures accomplish both functions. We will return to this passage in the later section but sufficient for now is the understanding that an elder cannot fill his primary roles if he himself is not thoroughly a man of the Word himself.

The implication of this for elders or those who would be elders is that their own devotion to the Scriptures must become a self-evident attribute. Of that man, there can be no hypocrisy when the phrase “a man of the Word” is applied to him. If it has a hollow ring, then that alone is reason to not consider him for the post. This is because, being a man of the Word is the core competency of the elder position. Other talents or even spiritual giftedness cannot compensate for its absence.

His being immersed in it evidences this devotion to the Word. He studies it daily, he delights to hear it preached and taught. He is one who seeks always to submit himself to its precepts. An academic interest, even an avid one is not what this devotion is really about. It is about a man who is so desirous of knowing his God more fully and serving Him more properly, that he looks intently into every corner of the Scripture that he might wrest from it every piece of the revelation of

God that it contains. It his love of God that takes to the Word and keeps taking him back to it.

In addition to personal devotion to the Word, he must also be able to effectively instruct others in it. “Able to teach” is *the* spiritual gift of the elder and if it is not there in a man, he should not be considered for the post. Pastor William Payne used to say that a man thinking about the pastorate should be considered based on his possession of the ability that he called “utterance”. By this he meant the ability to coherently and persuasively speak in front of others. Since the pastor must do this repeatedly, then its absence he reasoned is an insuperable obstacle to any man entering vocational ministry without it. Since the man we call the pastor is an elder devoted full time to the role, then this is also the standard by which any elder must be evaluated as well. A man may be an ardent student and lover of the Word, but if he cannot communicate the Word to others then he cannot fill the elder’s post.

In this we also need to recognize that teaching can be exercised in different contexts. In addition to preaching to a congregation or teaching in front of a large group, there are other venues where this teaching role may legitimately find expression. It could be one on one over coffee. It could be accomplished through the written word. In this day of emailing, websites, blogs and text messaging, this is an exploding avenue by which this gift can find “voice”. However, since the elder’s ministry is accomplished within the context of a congregation, it must also be evidenced face to face. It isn’t sufficient that a man be an effective “blogger” of the Word, he must also be able to articulate the Word in front of people (even if only one on one) in order to interact and persuade with conviction from the Scriptures.

A Man of Spiritual Maturity

The term “elder” itself suggests the office most often occupied by those who are older. This is not a prerequisite of the office. However, since

maturity of faith takes some time to be formed, it is not surprising that the majority of elders are at least in their thirties before assuming the post. In addition, it takes time for a man to be seen by others to possess the other discernable qualities of an elder. Paul insists that an elder “not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Tim 3:6). By insisting that an elder not be a neophyte to the faith, Paul wants to give opportunity for the genuineness of the man’s faith to be demonstrated. A new convert is an untested commodity. The reality of his profession is something that only time and trials can reveal.

A post of leadership, by its nature has stresses and temptations that are unique and are in addition to the ordinary trials of the Christian life. For example, the position can put a man under a spotlight that he would not otherwise experience. He may receive praise in a manner to which he is not accustomed. A new believer in this setting can easily lose sight of the fact that his standing is a matter of grace and begin to think that he is where he is by virtue of his own abilities and talent. An attitude of entitlement then quickly slips in. Paul rightly understood that once such pride takes hold of a man is a prime candidate for a terrible fall. The risk is so great that Paul compares the possible consequences for such a man to that incurred by Satan for his rebellion (2 Pet 2:4). It is obvious that Paul felt very strongly on the matter or he would not have painted so dire a picture of the possible consequences. If the ruination of a man’s faith is the possible consequence, then the consideration of such a man should be out of the question.

Another risk that putting a man whose faith is untested into this situation is that it sets him up for failure. His immaturity as a believer may lead him to make mistakes that will antagonize those who he is suppose to lead. The ensuing conflict may leave this man discouraged to the point that he quits the post. His faith may not be ruined, but he may never again be willing to risk being put into a leadership position, lest he again experience the same hurt of rejection.

The real problem with the practice of making an immature believer an elder is the risk that it poses to the congregation. Placing a neophyte in charge of the spiritual care of people is a reckless and irresponsible practice. An elder is charged to facilitate the growth of the faith of the members of the congregation. If he himself doesn't possess it then, he won't be able to lead others to it. First of all his life is not a pattern that others should follow; so he can't lead by the example he has set. Secondly, he doesn't know what it takes to achieve spiritual maturity since God has not yet brought him through the process. Consequently, he cannot tell anyone else how to achieve it. Thirdly, if people do follow a wrong direction he sets, he will lead them all into a quagmire from which the congregation may not recover.

Summary

The joke about engineers goes "You can always tell an engineer. You just can't tell him much!" The point of the saying is that engineers are readily recognizable by a common set of attributes that people associate with the job. The point of this chapter is likewise that we should always be able to recognize an elder when we see one. This is because there is a well-delimited set of attributes, of moral character, of spiritual giftedness, of spiritual maturity that are to mark the man occupying the post.

Looking at these attributes one is struck by the fact that they are focused far more on personal qualities than on set of skills. The reason for this is because a large component of an elder's role has to do with who is and the example he sets. This will be discussed at some length in the next section. The lesson for us from this is that when it comes to evaluating a man for the eldership, the first things to look at are the personal spiritual qualities that he possesses (or doesn't possess as the case may be).

We tend to be impressed by men of action and look first of all at his resume of accomplishments. This is the regular practice of the world of

business. But when it comes to choosing an elder, it is not first of all what a man has done that matters, but who he is. Is he a man of impeccable character? Is his moral character known and known to be pure? Is he a loving husband and father? Is his life under control or do circumstances, substances or desires control him? Is he a believer of long standing? When his name comes to mind, do the qualities of godliness and holiness fit? Finally, is he recognizably a man of the Scriptures? If the answer to these and other questions only raise other questions, then an impressive record of accomplishments mean nothing because such a man is not suitable to be an elder. But if, when posing these questions, the answers come readily and positively then such a man is a good fit for this post.

His Role

This section moves from the man to the functions or roles that he is fill within the local congregation. The description of these roles makes sense of the spiritual profile that the previous section has presented of the elder. The man of the qualities described in the previous major section is the best one suited for the roles he fills within the congregation.

This section gives a synthetic organization of the New Testament teaching on the elder's assigned role. Rather than passage-by-passage treatment, it organizes the biblical material around the major aspects of the role. Having said that however, it is organized by taking the language of 1 Peter 5:2,3. This text is perhaps the quintessential expression of the roles that an elder fills. "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock"

Following from that verse, the first three sub-divisions of this section are titled:

1. Be Shepherds of the Flock of God: a discussion of the pastoral care role provided by the elder.
2. Serve as Overseers: a discussion of the oversight role provided by the elder.

Those who give oversight do so from three points of view, with foresight (looking and planning ahead), with insight (into the Word and the lives of the people they serve) and with hindsight (reflecting upon what has transpired with a view to learning lessons for the future).

3. Being Examples to the Flock: a discussion of the leadership role provided by elders. Spiritual leaders lead by personal example, by commitment to the core values as enunciated in the Word and by communication of God's vision of the future (the earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord).

Be Shepherds to the Flock

The management of the company where I work announced that a large number of employees will be laid off and the jobs that they perform transferred to persons whose services can be obtained much more economically in Eastern Europe and India. The motivation for doing this is purely economic and while such a decision seems justifiable on the basis that it is in the best interest of the firm, it is plain that it is a decision made at the expense of numbers of employees. This example illustrates why corporate leadership models are not an appropriate fit for the church. Church leadership that views even one person as expendable just isn't going to cut it within the church.

"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost." (Matt 18:12 – 14)

The shepherd's heroic efforts to assure that 100 out of 100 sheep are safe is, says Jesus, illustrative of God's comprehensive care that will not allow anyone to slip through the cracks. If God so acts, those who lead in the church must do so with the same mindset.

Not surprisingly then, we find that the most common Scriptural image of a leader is that of the shepherd. As such it is just part of a larger panorama of usage of the shepherd image.

1. The Lord as Shepherd.

"In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed" (Ex. 1:13) is pastoral language of the LORD as shepherd over His people. This is language used many times in the Old Testament to characterize God's care as that of the good shepherd. See Gen 48:15; 49:24; Ps 23:1; 28:9; 80:1; Isa 40:11; Jer 31:10; Ezek 34:11ff.

God Himself set a pattern for leadership that He expected to be mimicked by those set in authority over His people. This of course an

amazing condescension on God's part. He represents Himself by a humble role not just to characterize His care in terms anyone can understand, but also to provide a model that any leader can imitate. It's not rocket science!

2. Israel as God's Flock

The Lord is the shepherd and so obviously, the people of God are the sheep. Sheep are prone to wander, so the image is used oft times to picture their wayward character. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" says Isaiah 53:6. See also Nu 27:17; Ps 44:22; 78:52; 100:3; 119:176; Jer 50:6; Exe 34:11; Zec 13:7. Frequently the image is negative, but on the occasion it is positive and speaks good of our relationship with God. For example Ps 100:3 "we are his people, the sheep of his pasture".

3. Notable Biblical Shepherds.

Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and Amos, prominent characters from the Old Testament were all shepherds. For some of them, their career as shepherds was a very prominent aspect of their development toward the time when they would become leaders.

- a) Jacob bested Laban repeatedly through his ski
- b) It was during the time that God readied him for his return to Canaan and his famous encounter with the Angel of the Lord.
- c) Moses herded the herds of his father in law Jethro up until the Lord deemed him ready lead the Israelites out of Egypt (not accidentally through the same lands where for years grazed Jethro's flocks).
- d) David learned basic lessons of reliance upon God in times of crisis and fear as he protected his father's sheep against marauding beasts.
- e) Amos, the shepherd from Tekoa whom the Lord took "from tending the flock" (7:15) then uses the imagery of the shepherding to describe the deliverance of God from enemies (3:12).

4. Jesus' the Good Shepherd.

“Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” reads John 1:29. In the New Testament he is both shepherd and lamb; He who tends the sheep is sacrifice for them.

Of course, one of the most sublime and powerful passages for use of imagery is John 10 where Jesus makes the astounding claim to be the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. Again, just as the Lord in the Old Testament chose the image of Shepherd to provide a pattern, so also Jesus intends to leave a model for leading by adopting the same metaphor. That becomes crystal in John 21 with Jesus’ charge to Peter “feed my sheep”.

5. The Church as God’s Flock

The implication is of course, that the people of God in the New Testament are likewise to be considered God’s flock. The image is not employed nearly as widely as is the case in the New Testament. We might conjecture about the reason for this. My thinking is that it is because the Church takes root in the urban culture of the Roman world where the rural imagery doesn’t have the same force. See 1 Cor 3:9 for different images of field and building as applied to the people of God. Nevertheless, the image is there. See Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 9:7; 1Ptr 2:25; 5:2,3

Shepherds function to **protect**, to **direct** and to **correct**. Likewise the elder and the eldership, if they are functioning properly, fill the same three key roles.

Protect the Flock

Paul’s warning to the elders of Ephesus was “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock” (Acts 20:9). Now as then, there are always those who act with destructive effect in churches. Those actions can be and are of different kinds. Some sew discord by speaking maliciously against the leadership or church policy. Some bring in heretical teaching that undermines the gospel. Some act and entice others in morally reprehensible ways that bring a congregation into disrepute. Some use

the church as a platform for personal advancement. Whatever the case, all are like wolves because they consume the faith of the sheep.

The first order of business then for the elder is vigilance. Elders are the first line of defence that a congregation has against heresy, or discord or a moral breach, etc. That being said, the elder needs to be able to recognize the enemies of the sheep. A shepherd is only successful in so far as he knows what are the potential threats to his sheep. So for example, the shepherd who doesn't know what a wolf looks like will not have sheep for long. Likewise, an elder who is untrained in the teaching of scripture will not be able to recognize heresy. Or an elder who lacks discernment regarding people's character will not be able to pick out those who may cause trouble.

The enemies of the flock against which the elder must guard include those already mentioned: heresy, moral compromise and contentious or ambitious persons. In addition to these three are the following:

- A growing indifference toward, even intolerance of the Scriptures.

The most conspicuous measure of this is in the length of sermons that are deemed acceptable. It is not uncommon for Sunday Sermons to be forcibly curtailed to twenty minutes and for it to have only a secondary role within the Sunday service and meanwhile performance orientated "worship teams" occupy centre stage for longer and longer amounts of time.

The other conspicuous measure of this is the unwillingness of Christians and congregations to meet on a Sunday evening, even in small groups. A single small dose of the Word is deemed sufficient for an entire week.

The harm that this lack of ardour for the Word represents is lukewarm ness toward God Himself. Where God's Word is ignored God Himself is inevitably shunted aside. Children who turn a deaf ear to their parents' voice do so after having already dismissed as irrelevant the ones whose words they shut out.

The elder must lead by example by being first of all a good hearer of the Word of God. Elders who take notes eagerly while listening to sermons or who give “amens” to sermons encourage others to be good listeners.

The elder who is devoted to preaching must expend himself in it, first in proper and careful preparation, then in lively and sincere preaching or teaching. His passion for the Word will be contagious.

- Indifference concerning prayer.

A church that doesn't provide occasions for corporate prayer or minimizes expressions of prayer within public services or doesn't repeatedly exhort its members to prayer is in a danger zone.

The danger that this represents is a misplaced self-sufficiency that doesn't see the need to be at the throne of grace in a continual appeal for the grace that gives it that name.

The elder's role is first to lead by example, by faithful attendance at the church provided prayer meeting, by prayers that provide a pattern that others can mimic in praying, by including praying in all interactions with people that are a part of the discharge of their elder duties.

- Complacency about known sin in the lives of members or leaders.

It is all too easy to turn a blind eye for the sake of keeping peace in the church.

The danger in this is to all but guarantee that there will be serious repercussions for the congregations. They may take the form of a split or an increase of the sin.

The elder's role is again, to lead by example with respect to a ruthless mortification of sin in his own life. If an elder doesn't mind his own sin, he much more easily habituated to it in the live of those to whom he is called to minister. But if he has had success in ridding himself of besetting sine, then he can be of genuine help to others who need to struggle against it.

- Lack of zeal for the gospel.

It may be displaced by social activism or it may be just plain neglect. Whatever the cause, the danger is that the odium of the cross may become an embarrassment. We may begin to take the world's view and see it as "foolishness" or "scandalous" (1 Cor 1).

- Hardheartedness towards those in need.
Self-absorption or self-preoccupation leaves no room for the needs of others. Those needs include both the spiritual and physical ones.

Further, vigilance implies persistence in watchfulness. The shepherd, who seldom checks for threats to his sheep, will lose them. The elder who doesn't persist in his watch-care over those under his charge will not be in a position to notice threats that has come in.

The second order of business is doing battle on behalf of the sheep. A young David killed bear and lion in order to save the lives of his sheep. An elder must also confront and combat threats to the church. We have already noticed that elders must not be combative by nature, because that would be disruptive. However, when a threat rears its head an elder must do combat until the threat has been beaten off. Not many people relish interpersonal conflict. But he who would be elder must realize that conflict will come as part of his role as protector of the flock.

Direct the Flock

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Forewarned is forearmed. These clichés point to the same underlying truth that the best way to protect someone from harm is to teach them about it before it comes. The elder's gift is their ability to teach, so that they might lead the congregation into truth. That truth will be all defence they require and will enable them to stand even when the elder is not around.

Peter charges fellow elders to “shepherd the flock of God” by “bishopsing”. He uses the verbal form of noun that designates their position, namely “bishop”. This reminds us that being an elder is not so much a status as it is action. That action is best described as keeping an intense eye on. The root verb “skopeo” means to look to or consider (see Rom 16:17; 2 Cor 4:18; Phil 3:17. The addition of the prefix “epi” elevates the perspective of the looker to a raised vantage point from which he or she might better see everything that is happening and then, by implication, direct the activities he observes.

Peter adds that this is not to be done by exercising a top-down authority (not as overlords). This would be the natural inclination of those who thing that the raised perspective of the elder is gaining personal advantage or to exert control. Instead this overseeing is by being out in front showing the way (being examples). So the elders perspective vis-à-vis the flock is not from above, so much as it is front out in front while he shows them the way.

A contemporary example is that of a team captain, who shows the way to victory by his own exemplary play. To be sure, he does speak to the other players, but the words he speaks have the solid example of his actions.

All strategic change that happens within a church should occur under the direction of its elders. They are charged to direct the church in the way that it should go. But that direction isn't to be done in a vacuum. It is to always be done in the context of their teaching ministry. If, for example, the elders wish to make a change in the church that represents a departure from that which has been the practice in the church for a number of years. That change should always be introduced as the end result of teaching. Many of the people in the pew care as much about the church as do its elders. If the elders are to take that concern seriously, then they need to understand why a change is being introduced and be convinced from Scripture that it is proper.

The last sub-division of this section will be a more conventional arrangement of the elder's work by identifiable activity or task. It is a breakdown down the job of the elder by the principle activities in which they are occupied. Thus this sub-division is titled: The Principles Activities of the Elder. The activities that this sub-division will discuss are the elder's duty to:

1. Teach and defend the Scriptures.
2. Pray over the Word and for the Congregation
3. Act as pastors to the membership. This has a number of components and contexts. It cannot be reduced to the elder visit. It must be a comprehensive approach that includes the following.
 - a. Meet and greet people during stated church services.
 - b. Provide hospitality to people in his own home so that they might sense your genuine love and concern for them
 - c. Actively engage them during church sponsored activities designed to promote fellowship.
 - d. Visit them in their times of sickness and difficulty to pray with them and encourage them.
 - e. Visit them formally in their homes to discern their spiritual state, provide biblical counsel and exhort or encourage as required.
4. Superintend all church activities and initiatives. This includes both the 'sacred' and the 'secular' aspects of church life. There is no aspect of church activity for which they do not have responsibility and so there is no area of church life from which they may be excluded. Every official function is to be with their knowledge and approval. The importance of the exercise of that oversight will be stressed here. Also, consideration of the manner that this supervision is given will be discussed.
5. Provide correction and discipline as needed. Mostly this consists of using the Scripture to point out to people where they are in errors. Usually people respond positively and reform

their behaviour. On occasion it will entail invoking formal discipline and exclusion from fellowship. This section will discuss the importance of this role and warn of the consequences of its neglect.

6. Watch out for one another's spiritual state. Elders must maintain the health of the eldership by pasturing one another. This sub-division will discuss the manner in which this should take place and point out the pitfalls that come of its neglect.

Jim Van Yperen makes a few observations about shepherds and shepherding as it was practiced in the ancient world that help us understand the appropriateness of the metaphor for the elder. We think about raising sheep from what we see as we drive by farms in the countryside of rural Ontario or from what we see in movies like *Lassie* or *Babe*. However, that imagery is far removed from the biblical picture of the nomadic or semi-nomadic sheep tending practices described in the Old Testament. What follows is a brief listing of the important points that Van Yperen points out.

1. It was a nomadic way of life. The skill of the shepherd was in leading sheep safely through changing terrain, moving from pasture to pasture through the seasons of the year.
2. It was a family occupation, done in community. There were various levels of shepherds working together, but always only one chief shepherd.
3. Shepherds led by experience. From experience came the ability to make good decisions that benefited the sheep or preserved them from harm. It was a craft that was learned over time and by hard won experience.
4. Shepherds led from the front. We think of a shepherd barking out orders to a dog who herded sheep. That's not what they did. The head shepherd went ahead and the sheep, because they knew and trusted him, gladly followed. He couldn't lead from the middle because he wouldn't meet danger before the sheep. Under shepherds walked with the sheep.

5. Protection was the first concern. Keep with that, a shepherd was armed with rod and sling against predators. He, if need be put his life on the line for the sheep.
6. The shepherd called the sheep by name. He knew the flock intimately and they knew him and would follow only him.
7. Sheepfolds were employed at night to safeguard the sheep. These were clefts in rocky places or small blind canyons guarded by the shepherd by placing himself at the entrance.
8. As Israel became more settled, “hirelings” were sometimes used. But since these were paid hands with no vested interest, their motivation to self-sacrifice was usually far smaller than the owner-shepherd.

The composite picture of shepherds is of men who live for the flock, watch over the flock, who lead the flock, who know the flock who protect the flock, who cooperate together for the flock and who become skilful in these aspects by devotion to the task over time. In our modern world it is difficult to think of role or occupation that even comes close to being so well suited to serve as a metaphor for the spiritual leader. This is no accident. God directs the development of culture and commerce to serve even the purpose of providing His own illustrations of what He is like and what His leaders should be like as well.