

THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (3)

Elders – what do they do?

A. Introduction

1. The Lord Jesus is the head of the church.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”
(Matthew 28:18)

“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.” (Ephesians 5:23)

2. The Lord Jesus instructs His church through His Word

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

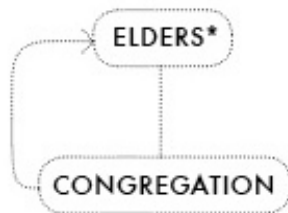
3. The Lord Jesus instructs each local church to appoint a plurality of elders to teach, oversee, lead, guide and be examples to the flock under their care.

“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” (Acts 14:23)

“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.” (Titus 1:5)

Elders are pastors (shepherds) and overseers (bishops).

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28)



4. The Lord Jesus will call the elders to give an account for the way they looked after the flock placed under their care.

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

B. Elders – are they needed?

1. Sheep need shepherds.

Sheep are vulnerable to attack from wolves and other ferocious animals.

Sheep drift away from food and safety and the fold.

Sheep get hurt.

Sheep get lost.

Sheep get themselves into messy situations.

The Bible describes followers of Jesus as sheep.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11)

2. Elders are shepherds given to care for the local church by the Lord Jesus.

They are His gift.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." (Ephesians 4:11)

C. Elders – how many?

1. More than one.

The pattern in all New Testament churches is a plurality of elders.

There is no suggestion of any church that had only one elder.

"From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church." (Acts 20:17)

"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed." (1 Peter 5:1)

2. It makes sense to have more than one.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no-one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

To complement one another and balance one another's weaknesses.

To share the workload.

To give accountability.

To *"keep pastors (especially young ones) from saying or doing dumb things, or from saying or doing the right things in unhelpful ways."* (Mark Dever)

To prevent the isolation of the pastor.

To allow the church to continue and grow if something happens to one of the elders.

3. What about the "pastor"?

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain, and The worker deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

The "pastor" is one of the elders.

The "pastor" is usually the elder who is set apart to devote their time and energy to preaching and teaching and will be supported by the church to do this.

Often the pastor will function as the "first among equals" within the elders.

D. Elders – what do they do?ⁱ

1. They feed the sheep.

“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these? Yes, Lord, he said, you know that I love you. Jesus said, Feed my lambs. Again Jesus said, Simon son of John, do you truly love me? He answered, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, Take care of my sheep. The third time he said to him, Simon son of John, do you love me? Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, Do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. Jesus said, Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17)

By preaching and teaching the Word.

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” (1 Timothy 4:13)

“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.” (Acts 20:20-21)

It is the Word that saves, nourishes, grows, trains, matures and protects the sheep.

The bad shepherd is the one who does not feed the sheep.

“These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted— twice dead.” (Jude 12)

2. They know the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” (John 10:14)

At the very minimum, the elders between them should know every member of the church individually.

“When they arrived, he said to them: You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.” (Acts 20:18-20)

“So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.” (Acts 20:31)

3. They lead the sheep.

“But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert.” (Psalm 78:52)

“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 5:17)

They cast vision, make decisions, give direction, affect change, inspire and energise.

They lead in thought, point out things to be accomplished and the best way for it to be done.

“They lie awake thinking about what the church should be, where the church should go, and how the church should function.” (Darrin Patrick)

“Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

They set godly examples for the sheep to follow.

4. They protect the sheep.

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:28-30)

They protect the church from false teachers.

They are on the lookout for dangers that can hurt the church.

They seek out the lost and straying sheep that are heading for danger.

They warn against sinful behaviour and bring discipline.

They act as peacemakers to stop infighting.

5. They care for the sheep

“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.” (James 5:14)

They visit the sick and pray for them.

They encourage, affirm, serve, listen, counsel, give wisdom, and meet whatever need the sheep may have.

They take the lead and set an example in this ministry that belongs to the whole church.

6. They love the sheep.

“...but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.” (2 Samuel 12:3)

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” (John 10:11-14)

These sheep are precious – they belong to God and have been bought with Christ’s blood.

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28)

7. Elders follow the example of the Good Shepherd.

“Would you know, then, the work of a shepherd? Look at Jesus of Nazareth, that great Shepherd of the sheep, who stands before us forever the perfect pattern of shepherdhood, the flawless example for all who are entrusted with the care of souls. “I am the Good Pastor,” He says, “I watch, I guard, I guide, I heal, I rescue, I feed. I love from the beginning, and I love to the end. Follow Me!” (Thomas Jefferson)

ⁱ Adapted from Charles Jefferson’s *The Minister as Shepherd* & Mark Dever’s *The Pastor as Shepherd*