

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, January 7, 2024

**Elder / Bishop (Overseer) / Pastor / Teacher**  
**Part 2: Duties of Elders**

Today, we will pick up where we left off the last time I preached, October 29, 2023. In that sermon, we began an analysis of the role of elder in the church. As a reminder, we are approaching this analysis under the following headings:

- What are the qualifications of an elder? (Part 1) – October 29, 2023
- What are the duties of an elder? (Part 2) - Today
- What are the duties of the members toward elders? (Part 3)

**What are the duties of an elder?**

As we saw in the first part of this sermon, the scriptures use several words to describe this single role in the church. Each of the words is descriptive of a function of that role – elder, pastor, teacher, overseer (bishop). Any of those words is suitable to identify the role, but none of them is used as an honorary title. The scriptures notably avoid a fancy org chart title – the focus is and will always be on the needfulness of the work itself. To that end, we will analyze the duties of the role by looking at the various words used to describe it; those words *are* the job description.

- **Bonus word - Minister:**
  - This word is sometimes used to describe the officers of the church. I didn't include it in our primary list, because it is also often used to more generally describe the duties of Christians. However, I want to mention it, because the definition of minister is very useful, both for elders in the church, and for every member, as we seek to serve our God acceptably. Here are two passages that seem to be using "minister" to refer to the elders in the church.
  - **1Corinthians 4:1** *"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."*
  - **1Peter 4:7-11** *"7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. 8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. 9 Use hospitality one to another without grudging. 10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."*

- Greek word for “ministers”: “huperetes” (Strong’s 5257) – a derivative of a word that means “to row”. This word means “an under-rower”, or “subordinate rower”; “Assisting in the work of another”. We row at the direction, and for the glory, of the captain of the ship. It’s not our ship, and we don’t give the orders; but it is our blessed privilege to work in the service of our Captain.
- **Elder**
  - Greek word: “presbuteros” (Strong’s 4245)
  - This word often refers to those who are older in age, or to the specific magistrates among the Jews. But there are many verses that use this word to refer to an officer of a New Testament church.
    - **Titus 1:5** *“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:”*
    - **1Peter 5:1-9** *“1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. 5 ¶ Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. 8 ¶ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”*
      - Notable: Peter was an Apostle – he had an extraordinary role and the gifts to perform it. But unlike Paul, he was also an elder at a particular church (Jerusalem). Here he styles himself as an equal with these men that he is exhorting, as a good example of how to use authority without lording over the heritage of God. Additionally, this flies in the face of any claim that the Catholic church makes about Peter being the first Pope and Vicar of Christ.

- 1Peter 5 contains a good overarching statement about the duties of an elder. For the moment we will let the words speak for themselves, because we will encounter these concepts again shortly. I would point out that we find 3 of our terms together in this little passage: elder, overseer, and pastor (shepherd), further demonstrating that these are all terms for the same office in the church.
- What do we specifically take from the use of the word “elder”, seeing that the word itself simply means “older”? These are men that have demonstrated experiential understanding of the scriptures. They are not novices. Their senses are exercised by reason of use. Additionally, they demonstrate in their lives, in their homes, in their business, and amongst the church that they are sober minded and grave.
  - **Hebrews 5:14** *“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*
  - **1Timothy 3:6** *“6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.”*
  - **Titus 2:2** *“That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.”*
- While this term is descriptive of these men, the characteristics are not exclusive to them. In other words, there are many in this flock that display these same characteristics, but who are not otherwise qualified or called into the role of elder in the church. That experience and behavior is additive to the work of the elders, and is a wonderful gift to the body, regardless of office, and should be employed to teach by word and by example in every appropriate way.
- **Pastor**
  - Greek word: “poimen” (Strongs 4166)
    - The meaning of the word is simply: “shepherd”.
    - Ephesians 4:11 is the only place in the Bible that the word is translated as “pastor”
      - **Ephesians 4:11** *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers”*
    - There are 17 other occurrences of the word; in all instances it is translated as “shepherd”. The English word “pastor” comes from the latin verb “pascere”, which means: “to lead to pasture, set to grazing, cause to eat”.
  - Christ uses this same word several times, including:

- ***John 10:11** I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. 12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. 13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*
    - A shepherd is to watch over, guide, and protect the flock.
      - He considers the flock as a whole, in order to keep them safe and in a suitable place to graze. But he also considers the needs of each individual sheep; considering their frame to provide what is needful. Some of the sheep are pregnant and burdened down; some are sickly or aged and need special care; some are young, proud, and combative; some are wayward and thereby endanger themselves and the flock as a whole. What help is needed in each of those circumstances?
      - He must watch and guard them from predators, lest grievous wolves enter in and devour the flock. The flock must know and hear the voice of the shepherd. This is the first and best defense against predators – when the shepherd spies evidence of danger, his voice guides the sheep to a safe place. If they do not know or respond to his voice, then there is no protecting them. The shepherds of a church are under-shepherds beneath Christ. The sheep will hear the voice of the Great Shepherd, and so if we are to effectively protect the flock, then we must guide them with His commands alone. Anything else is deadly confusion.
        - Two things are strongly implied by this analysis:
          - 1) A shepherd must resort with his flock. How can he know the frame and need of the sheep if he is casually acquainted with them, and only occasionally around them.
          - 2) The shepherd must be speaking, so that the sheep indeed know his voice. Not just occasionally from the pulpit, but continually interacting and teaching by his words and by his behavior.
    - A shepherd is to continually feed the flock:
      - ***John 21:15-17** “15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. 16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of*

*Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. 17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."*

- **Jeremiah 3:15** *"And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."*
  - We are to feed the sheep by teaching them the word of God, both in concept, and in specific application according to the circumstances of each of their lives. A shepherd then must have knowledge and understanding of both the scriptures, as well as the frames of the sheep and their various needs.
- Who are we supposed to feed? As pastors of a particular flock, we are to feed our flock. Sheep, not dogs, goats, or hogs. All Christians have a duty to preach the Gospel as heralds in this dark world, but this particular work of feeding / teaching belongs strictly to the sheep of the flock that we are set to shepherd.

- **Teacher**

- Greek word: "Didaskalos" (Strongs 1320)
  - 58 instances: "Master" (40); "master" (7); "teacher" (10); "doctor" (1)
  - The disciples and apostles often called Jesus by this word:
    - *Luke 7:40 "And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on."*
  - It is the equivalent to the Old Testament word "Rabbi":
    - *John 1:38 "Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?"*
  - The word "master" implies that there is a submission. Consider the way that men teach skills of various trades from one generation to the next. They appoint a "master" to instruct an "apprentice". This is a relationship that both parties agree to; the learner willingly seeks out and submits to the teacher because they value the instruction! We are commanded to cleave to, and obey the scriptural instruction of those that the Lord has appointed as teachers, because we believe that the Holy Spirit is doing the work in and through them, and that they are therefore feeding us with the bread of life, and leading us to drink from the fountain of living waters. Therefore, we must take heed to their scriptural

instruction, counsel, admonition, rebuke, etc., as though it is life and health for us. We do ourselves and our co-elect damage when we refuse good instruction, and turn to counselors who will confirm the desires of our heart.

- The verb form of this same Greek word is “Didasko” (Strong’s 1321) - “to teach”. This is the teaching that Jesus did, and the teaching that He commissioned His church to do:
  - **Matthew 7:29** *“For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”*
  - **Matthew 28:18-20** *“18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*
- We must teach according to His words, and none other:
  - **2Timothy 4:1-5** *“1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.”*
  - **Matthew 15:7-9** *“7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”*
- We must teach according to His pattern, and none other:
  - **1Timothy 2:12** *“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”*
- Jesus taught us that we must take up this work with humility, as being servants:
  - **John 13:12-17** *“12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? 13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for*

*so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. 16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. 17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."*

- We make a deadly mistake to engage in this work for some fleshly status or advantage:
  - **James 3:1** *"My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."*
  - **Matthew 23:1-12** *"1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. 4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, 6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. 8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. 9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. 10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. 11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."*
- **Overseer (Bishop)**
  - Greek words: "episcope" (Strongs 1984); "episkopos" (Strongs 1985)
    - These words are very similar: episcope refers to the work of oversight, while episkopos refers to the person performing the work.
    - Strongs definition: "an overseer - a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian or superintendent"
    - There are only 2 places where the word is translated as something other than bishop / overseer. In both places the word is "visitation", which I think adds a lot to our understanding of the work.
      - **Luke 19:41** *"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, 42 Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least*

*in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. 43 For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, 44 And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”*

- **1Peter 2:12** *“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*
  - Whether this day of visitation is the ultimate day of God’s judgment, or if it is the various visitation of our earthly masters (government, employers, or any other auditor of our behavior), the meaning is clear: this is inspection, investigation, examination, which necessarily brings forth judgment, whether to praise, or to punishment.
- This is a watchful work – a work of inspection. It is not a passive inspection, wherein we are just taking notes like an academic working in a lab. This is an active inspection that must be accompanied by encouragements and corrections. This is the work of ruling in the house of God. (**1Timothy 3:4, 1Timothy 5:17**) We are to inspect and ensure that the doctrine and practice of the body is aligned with the commands of God. As overseers, if we are shying away from that work – covering our eyes and employing a strategy of “hope” - then we are not doing our job. As a parallel, it would be unscriptural and worthless for a parent to inspect their children, see that their behavior needs help, and then just say: “I hope it works out” – “I hope they learn better” – “I’ll pray that God shows them better”. Yes, we **must** pray early and often that the Lord will instruct, guide, exercise, correct, and comfort the hearts, as we know that the visitation of the Holy Spirit is the **only** way that provocations will take root. However, we have to dig in and do the work to give the provocation, instruction and correction in the first place. So it is with an overseer in the church. We have to do it betimes, and despite our own fears and insecurities. We have to push past the endless defense mechanisms of the prideful human heart. We have to do it, remembering that we seek to please God, and not the egos of men. We have to do it, or else we are failing of our duty, and we are worthless watchmen on the wall, and blood will be on our hands. (**Ezekiel 3; 33**)



- Once again, we see that Christ is named by these same words, which points us to the gravity of the role, and the accountability before God.
  - **1Peter 2:25** *“For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”*
- Those that execute this office are servants, and are not to lord over God’s heritage. However, they are also supposed to rule in the house of God. Moses surely ruled, and yet was the meekest of all men (**Numbers 12:2,3**); so must those behave who are stewards in the household of faith. We must not lord over, but we must rule well.
  - **Romans 12:3-10** *“3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; 7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; 8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. 10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;”*
  - Gill: *“Now the rule and government of pastors of churches is not to be exercised in an arbitrary way; they are not to rule with force and cruelty, as the shepherds of Israel are complained of; they are not to lord it over God’s heritage; they have not dominion over their faith, nor the command of their practice at their wills; they cannot oblige them to receive a doctrine, nor to follow a practice, that is of their own or of human invention: but they are to govern according to the word of God, and the laws and rules which Christ, as King and Head of the church, has given: and when they rule according to these, they may be said to rule well, and should be respected and obeyed, and counted worthy of honour. And this ruling, as well as feeding, should be with knowledge and understanding, in a wise, prudent, and discreet manner.”*

I will leave you for today with the provocation that Paul gave to the elders of the church at Ephesus. This passage speaks to the gravity and needfulness of the work.

**Acts 20:17-38** “17 ¶ And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. 18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, 19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: 20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, 21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. 24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. 26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. 27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. 32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. 34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. 36 ¶ And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. 37 And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, 38 Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.”

I love you all. Amen.