

If A Man Aspires to Eldership, He Aspires to a Good Work

Grace Chapel November 1, 2009 (Reformation Sunday) Dr. John Niemelä

INTRODUCTION

TWO FACETS OF THE GOOD WORK OF ELDERSHIP:

1. **As viewed by other people: God’s provision for church leadership**
Part 1: An overview of eldership
2. **As viewed by God: A solemn responsibility, a charge.**
Part 2: A charge to our new elder: Lester Fountain

ELDERS: GOD’S PROVISION FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP (3 views)

| | Baptist (Single Elder) | Plymouth Brethren (Plural Elders) | Presbyterian (Plural Elders) |
|----------------|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Elders | 1 teaching/ruling | 3+ teaching/ ruling (but no pastor) | 1 teaching/ruling ----- 2+ ruling |
| Deacons | 2+ | 2+ | 2+ |

Excursus: Rom 16/Col 4 show that those two churches each had less than 100 people

By New Testament standards, we are not a small church. We would be average in size.

The New Testament model has a plurality of elders per congregation (1 Timothy 5:17)

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine [teaching]. (1 Timothy 5:17)

The underlined words (above) are plural. There are two views

1. more than one church (each with a single elder), or
2. one church (with a plurality of elders). **I will argue for this view.**

Double honour is a reference to financial compensation. Note that supported widows (1 Timothy 5:3) received *honour* (a financial stipend). Apparently, elders (assumed to be married) received twice the honorarium of widows (not married).

(While we are on this topic, I have no complaints about my compensation).

Doctrine (*didaskalia*) = *teaching* (note that *didaskō* = *to teach*)

Continued exposition of 1 Tim 5:17: *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.*

Consider the logic of what Paul says:

1. Some elders rule well; (presumably) others do not rule well.
2. Some elders labor in the word and teaching; others do not.

It is child's play to determine which of four is the most worthy of double honorarium and which of the four is the least worthy.

Those who both rule well & labor in the W+T are most worthy.

Those who neither rule well nor labor in the W+T are least worthy.

| | Some rule well | Some don't rule well |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Some elders labor in word & teaching | <i>1 = most worthy</i> | <i>?</i> |
| Some elders don't labor in word & teaching | <i>?</i> | <i>4 = least worthy</i> |

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

Elders who rule well but do not labor in the word & teaching are worthy of double honour, but elders who labor in the word and teaching (but do not rule well) are not worthy of double honour.

| | Some rule well | Some don't rule well |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Some elders labor in word & teaching | <i>1 = most worthy</i> | <i>3 = unworthy</i> |
| Some don't labor in word & teaching | <i>2 = 2nd most worthy</i> | <i>4 = unworthy</i> |

IMPLICATIONS FOR SINGLE-ELDER (BAPTIST) MODEL

If Paul assumes that each congregation has exactly one elder, he declares ruling well to be **more important** than laboring in the word and teaching.

If he rules well, **pay him** (even if he does not labor in W+T).

If he labors in W+T (but does not rule well) **don't pay him**.

This is the issue (in this passage) that convinced me that the single-elder model is contrary to Paul's working assumptions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLURAL-ELDER MODELS

Under the plurality of elders models, all elders rule; but not all elders labor to exhaustion in studying and pulpit teaching.

The fact that a ruling (but non-teaching elder) labors to exhaustion in an outside job (rather than in the study & pulpit) **does not** signal failure.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

A double honorarium does not mean full-time salary + benefits, unless an impoverished church of 50 could fully compensate 3 full-time elders.

QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

Single-elder model advocates often say that elders must have a teaching gift. They cite:

A bishop¹ [overseer] then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, **able to teach** [*didaktikos*] (1 Tim 3:2, NKJ).

The phrase *able to teach* translates a single word, *didaktikos*. These are the only NT uses of this word. It is a verbal adjective.

The voice of verbal adjectives is ambiguous. *Able to teach* is an active-voice rendering = *teachingable*. *Teachable* is a passive-voice rendering. Which of these is correct? Let us examine the two verses more closely.

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, **teachable (1 Tim 3:2)**.

Blameless = *anepilēpton* = not overstepping moral limits

Husband of one wife = *mias gunaikos andra* = no improper sexual relationships.²
Literally, *one-woman man*

Temperate = *nēphaios* = moderation (balanced)

Sober-minded = *sōphrōn* = prudent (rational or reasonable)

Of good behavior = *kosmios* = respectable (not given to shocking behavior)

Hospitable = *philoxenos* = friendly to strangers (welcoming to others)

Teachable = *didaktikos* = (open to correction from the Bible & from other bels)

Teachable fits context better than *teachingable (able to teach)*. The verse speaks of one who stays in bounds, rather a communicator. This verse **does not require** for each elder to have the gift of *teacher*. (Other passages tell us that he should be an equipper).

¹ The Greek word rendered *bishop* = *episkopos*. Bishop is not a translation, but a transliteration. **EPISKOPOS**
The *E* was dropped, the *P* was changed to *B*, the *K* to *H*, and the *OS* was dropped. **BISHOP**

1 Peter 5:1–2 makes *overseer [bishop]* and *elder* equivalent. “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder . . . :² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers. . . .” Peter addresses men who are both *elders* and *overseers [bishops]*. Elders both oversee and shepherd the flock.

² We will examine this word closely later in the 1 Timothy series. Unfortunately, evangelicals have pushed the term beyond Paul’s focus. Some have even gone so far as to say that Paul precludes a widower who gets married from eldership. No, Paul means the man be faithful in monogamous marriage. An elder cannot be promiscuous.

QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS (continued)

We considered 1 Timothy 3:2 in regard to *teachability*.

Let us consider the rest of 1 Timothy 3:1–7.

A preliminary word about the qualifications.

An issue of balance arises.

The only man who perfectly meets the *character issues* would be Jesus Christ.

Even so, Paul & Barnabas appointed elders for every church as they were in Asia Minor (Acts 14:23). Likewise, Titus was to appoint elders in every city in Crete (Titus 1:5) Clearly, qualifications are not to be treated as so rigorous that only Jesus Christ would meet them.

Yet, Jesus Christ was never married and never raised children. Ditto for Paul.

Thus, under the most rigorous interpretations of the marriage and family issues, neither Jesus Christ nor Paul would qualify as elders.

Our approach to the balance issue is: No glaring weaknesses. Practically, this means that an area needing some more attention can be balanced out by having several exceptionally strong areas—if the candidate is committed to developing an even closer walk with the Lord.

We welcome Lester Fountain as an elder.

(3:1) Aspiring to be an *overseer* [or *elder*] is to aspire to a good work

¹This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop [or *overseer*. Overseer = elder], he desires a good work.

Observe that it is not an honorary title (like the Nobel Prize), but it involves **work**

(3:2) *We already considered this verse*

² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, ~~able to teach~~ [teachable];

(3:3) The elder is not to be a problem drinker, not money-hungry, kind, does not incite arguments, not driven to acquire

³ not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;

(3:4–5) The elder is to lead his own household well, including his (at home) children, because one who fails to lead his home will also fail in leading God’s assembled believers

⁴ one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence.

⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);

(3:6) The elder is not to be a novice in order to prevent pride from causing him to suffer judgment (removing him from office): pride being the cause of Satan suffering judgment that removed him from his office

⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.

Better translation of the last phrase: *fall into the devil’s judgment.*

An unfortunate feature of the NKJ translation of this verse is that people tend to think of a future condemnation of Satan. Rather, *eis krima empesē tou diabolou*, would literally be *fall into the devil’s judgment*. Instead, it looks at a past judgment of the devil, his removal from office as the highest of angels. Similarly, the elder whose pride causes a spectacular failure will face a judgment that involves removal from office.

Paul does not say that experienced men are immune from destructive pride. They are not. What he says is that novices are prone to destructive pride.

This verse not only warns about appointing a novice, but also warns of pride.

(3:7) The elder must have a good reputation among even unbelievers in order to rise above reproach and satanic snares

⁷ Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The snares include failing on the foregoing traits, causing reproach (disqualification)

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ELDERS

Those with equipping gifts are to equip the saints for ministry to edify the body

Eph 4¹¹ And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors [the word for pastors = shepherds] and [some]³ teachers,¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. . . .

APEPTs (Apostles + Prophets + Evangelists + Pastors + Teachers) equip saints

APEPTs equip saints for ministry work

APEPTs equip saints for ministry work so saints edify Christ's body.

Apostles (when they lived) equipped saints to do ministry work to edify Christ's body.⁴

Prophets (when they lived) equipped saints to edify Christ's body (the Church).

Evangelists (still today) equip saints to edify Christ's body (the Church).

Pastors (still today) equip saints to edify Christ's body (the Church).

Teachers (still today) equip saints to edify Christ's body (the Church).

It seems logical that elders are to be equippers, so Ephesians 4:11–12 says much about the responsibility of elders (even though not using the term elder).

Note: Evangelists have ministry to saints: to equip them to share the message of life.

³ Some argue from the Granville Sharp construction that the end of verse 11 = pastor-teachers. However, it is plural. Hyphenation applies only to singulars. For example Rev. 21:8 uses the same construction to refer to plurals: “cowardly [people], unbelieving [people], abominable [people], murderers, sexually immoral [people], sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars.” The point is not that one must be cowardly + unbelieving + abominable + murderous + immoral + sorcerous + idolatrous + lying. Its should not be hyphenated (cowardly-unbelieving-abominable-murderous-immoral-sorcerous- idolatrous-liars). Similarly, Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 do not speak of apostle-prophets. Ephesians 4:11 speaks of pastors and speaks of teachers. Not all pastors are teachers; not all teachers are pastors.

⁴ We do not believe that the gifts of apostleship or prophecy still continue, but that is for another message.

THE CHARGE TO OUR NEW ELDER

Acts 20¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰ how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

(20:17) Paul called for the Ephesian elders to meet him as he came to Miletus

(20:18) Paul asserted that they knew of his character as he was among them (for 3 years)

(20:19) The reason they knew of his character is because he humbly served the Lord through great persecution by Jewish unbelievers

(20:20–21) Paul did not deprive them of anything profitable to them (despite the persecution), but taught them in public gatherings and in homes, proclaiming to both Jews and Gentiles repentance toward God (for harmony with God) and faith toward Jesus Christ (for everlasting life)

The sole condition for receiving everlasting life is believing in Jesus Christ

Faith (believing) is not synonymous with repentance

Note here that repentance is directed toward God, faith is toward Christ

Acts 20²⁷ "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.³² So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

(20:27) Paul gave them (over three years) God's comprehensive message

This does not mean that he expounded every biblical passage that had then been written

(20:28) The elders are to give heed to each other and to the flock which they oversee in order to shepherd God's church, which Christ purchased in His death on the cross

(20:29) [The reason they are to carefully shepherd their flock (a portion of God's church)] is because wolves will enter in among the elders—who will destroy the flock

(20:30) [In addition to outsider wolves entering in] some elders will teach false things, leading away those who will learn from them

(20:31) [Based on problems with outsider & insider wolves] they are to give diligent heed to what Paul has warned for the past 3 years [about wolves]

(20:32) [Based on his warnings about coming opposition to the truth] Paul turns these elders over to the Lord, who can edify them [to do their work] and to reward them [at the Bema]

CONCLUSION