

The Messenger



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

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Listen to PROVE ALL THINGS on 730 AM WKRE, Sunday mornings from 8:15 to 8:30

Elders in the New Testament Period

by Gary Henry

(continuation)

The Responsibilities of an Elder

- A. It is dangerous to forget that the eldership is a work - I Tim. 3:1.
- B. We need to understand not merely the authority of the eldership, but also the proper usages of that authority.
 - 1. Concerning the function of the eldership, we will look in this lesson at its responsibilities (purposes, goals).
 - 2. We will then be able to explore in the next lesson the means (activities, methods) of fulfilling these responsibilities.
- C. Let us consider now, from a scriptural standpoint, the responsibilities God has given to elders.

What is the Work of an Elder?

- A. Elders *rule* - I Tim. 5:17. Cf. I Tim. 3:4, 5; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24.
- B. Elders *watch* - Heb. 13:17. Cf. Ezek. 3:16-21; 33:1-11.
- C. Elders are described in three principal ways and each description adds to our understanding of the elder's work.
 - 1. *Elder/presbyter*. This term emphasizes who is to do the work.
 - a. Greek words.
 - 1) “Elder” is a translation of *presbuteros* - an old(er) man - Acts 11:30; 14:23; etc. Cf. John 8:9.

- 2) Cf. *presbuterion* – elders as a group – I Tim. 4:14, Cf. Acts 22:5
- b. “Elder” indicates age, experience, maturity – it connotes wisdom and dignity (Bullinger).
2. *Overseer/bishop*. This term emphasizes *what* the work is.
- a. Greek words.
- 1) “Overseer” is a translation of *episkopos* – “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” (Thayer) – Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; etc.
 - 2) Cf. *episkopeo* – take care, see to it; oversee, care for – Heb. 12:15; I Pet. 5:2.
 - 3) Cf. *episkope* – position of an overseer – Acts 1:20; I Tim. 3:1.
- b. “Oversight” involves the twin aspects of *inspection* and *guardianship* (Bullinger).
- c. To “supervise” is to “oversee” but not “overlook”!
- d. “Taking the oversight” (I Pet. 5:2 KJV) means accepting it, not seizing it.
3. *Shepherd/pastor*. This term emphasizes *how* the work is to be done.
- a. Greek words.
- 1) “Shepherd” is a translation of *poimen* – shepherd – Eph. 4:11. Cf. Matt. 9:36; John 10:11; I Pet. 2:25 (cf. Matt. 2:6); etc.
 - 2) Cf. *poimnion* – flock – Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2, 3.
 - 3) Cf. *poimaino* – herd, tend; care for, look after – John 21:16; Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2
- b. The elders were the pastors in New Testament congregations, not the preacher or preachers.
- c. “Feed” (Acts 20:28 and I Pet. 5:2 in the KJV) is more accurately translated “shepherd.” A shepherd’s work with a flock involves:
- 1) Leading, guiding, showing the way. *Shepherds of God’s flock serve as an example*. Cf. I Pet. 5:3; etc.
 - 2) Feeding, providing, leading to pasture. *Shepherds of God’s flock provide spiritual nourishment*. Cf. Jer. 3:15; Heb. 13:7. (Food must be provided that is pure and not contaminated with error. Cf. the “pure” milk of the word in I Pet. 2:2.)
 - 3) Guarding from danger and predators, risking life for. *Shepherds of God’s flock give spiritual protection*. Cf. Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:9-11. (This is not a pleasant part of shepherding, but one who is too cowardly to do so is but a hireling. Cf. John 10:11-13.)
 - 4) Tending the flock. *Shepherds of God’s flock seek those who stray*. Cf. Luke 15:4-7. (Some shepherds, unfortunately, are themselves the cause of the scattering. Cf. Jer. 23:1,2.)
 - 5) Caring for the weak, sick, and injured. *Shepherds of God’s flock help those who need help*. Cf. Acts 20:34, 35; James 5:14, 15.
- d. Woe to “shepherds” who have neglected their duties or abused God’s flock – cf. Ezek. 34:1-10.

to be continued