

# Notes on *Biblical Eldership*

## by Alexander Strauch

*\* These are notes from the excellent book by Alexander Strauch. While exceptions may be taken on various views of Strauch, still this is one of the best texts on Biblical Eldership available. Even if you don't agree with his view on everything, please do not miss the value of this text.*

### **Chapter One - Pastoral Leadership**

There is a great misconception in the church today concerning what a true biblical eldership looks like. Both Peter (1 Peter 5:2) and Paul (Acts 20:28) steer us away from the idea of a CEO and towards the image of a shepherd. As keepers of the sheep, New Testament elders are to:

- 1) Protect the Flock
  - \* From false teachers (judge doctrinal error)
  - \* From wolves (for sheep are defenseless animals)
- 2) Feed the Flock
  - \* There is an emphasis on the centrality of teaching God's Word
  - \* Elders are required to be "apt to teach"
  - \* Sheep are nearly incapable of feeding and watering themselves
- 3) Lead the Flock
  - \* Elders are "overseers" - they supervise and manage the church
  - \* Give vision - (Sheep are not independent travelers)
  - \* A congregation needs leadership, management, governance, guidance, counsel, correction and vision
  - \* This requires hard and diligent work - spiritual laziness is a major reason why most churches will never establish a biblical eldership
- 4) Care for the Flock
  - \* Elders must meet whatever practical needs the flock may have (visit the sick, comfort the bereaved, strengthen the sick, pray for all the sheep, even those who are difficult, visit new members, provide counsel, etc.
  - \* The elders, however, are not the only ministers - the flock is also a body of Spirit-gifted, royal priests, able to care for one another.
  - \* "Man before business, because man is your business"

There is a difference between "board elders" (advisors, committee men, directors, executives) and true biblical elders. A true biblical eldership is not a businesslike committee. It is a biblically qualified council of men that jointly pastors the local church.

### **Chapter Two - Shared Leadership**

The New Testament provides conclusive evidence that the pastoral oversight of the apostolic churches was a team effort - not the sole responsibility of one person. Jesus Christ gave the church plurality of eldership. (See Acts 15; James 5:14; Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17,28; 1 Tim 5:17; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 1:1, 5:1, and many others)

An eldership patterned on the New Testament model requires qualified elders who meet specific moral and spiritual qualifications before they serve (1 Tim 3:1-7). Such elders must be publicly examined by the church (1 Tim 3:10). They must be publicly installed into the office (1 Tim 5:22; Acts 14:23). They must be motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do their work (Acts 20:28). And they must be acknowledged, loved and honored by the whole flock.

We are talking here about a *council of equals*. *To be a lone chief atop a pyramid is abnormal and corrupting*. The benefits to this plurality are great, including:

- \* Balancing each others weaknesses
- \* Lightening the workload (also allowing each shepherd elder to function according to personal giftedness)
- \* Providing accountability

there are also hazards to leadership by a council of elders. This leadership method can at times be painfully slow and aggravating. It can also lead to inaction unless good management and communication are present.

**First among equals** is the biblical pattern for elderships, seen first in the apostolate (Peter first among the twelve), then in the seven deacons (Steven and Philip) and in Paul and Barnabas (Paul), and in the way the congregation honors elders (1 Tim 5:17-18). This doesn't mean that the first elder does all the thinking or makes all the decisions for the group, or that he is pastor and the others are "merely elders".

The advantage of the principle of "first among equals" is that it allows for functional, gift-based diversity among the eldership team without creating an official, superior office over fellow elders. This often requires that the lead brother be a full-time (paid) pastor/elder.

### **Chapter Three - Male Leadership**

A biblical eldership must be an all male eldership. Though men and women are fully equal in personhood, dignity and value, they are distinct in gender roles. Jesus was male, he chose male disciples, they appointed seven men as deacons, and there was a model of male leadership in the New Testament churches.

There are headship/submission roles in marriage and in the local church. An all-male eldership speaks of agreement with and obedience to God's all important plan for the sexes in which the man uniquely reflects God's image and glory in headship and the woman uniquely reflects the glory of the man by her submission to the man's God-given task of spiritual headship.

Abdication of male leadership is a tragedy in the church. Ultimately, the abdication of male headship is a refusal to submit to Christ's Word and Lordship

### **Chapter Four - Qualified Leadership**

The most common mistake made by churches that are eager to implement eldership is to appoint biblically unqualified men . We must choose the right kind of men (1 Tim 3), they must be publicly examined (1 Tim 3:10, 5:24-25), they must be spiritually and morally qualified (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

Elders must have irreproachable character, be living examples to the flock - these are observable, objective standards for leaders in God's house. Strauch lists the qualifications for elders that are seen in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and 1 Peter 5. Most of the biblical qualifications relate to the candidate's moral and spiritual qualities. Character comes first. Secondly, the candidate's abilities must include: able to manage his family well; able to provide a model for others to follow; able to teach and defend the faith. spirit-given motivation for loving and caring for the flock.

### **Chapter Five - Servant Leadership**

The only way for the an eldership to truly work together and effectively shepherd the flock is to have the same servant-spirit of leadership that Jesus lived out.

Consider Jesus:

- \* Gentle and humble (Matt 11:29)
- \* Humble servants of all (Mark 9:33-35)
- \* Sacrifice, service and suffering (Mark 10:35-45)
- \* The humble shall be exalted (Matt 23:1-12)
- \* One who serves (Luke 22:24-27)
- \* Washing one another's feet (John 13:3-17)
- \* Love (John 13:34-35)

Consider Paul

- \* Paul restrained to use his authority
- \* He avoided self-promotion
- \* He sacrificed personal gain for others
- \* He put the spiritual welfare of his converts first place
- \* He didn't use his heavenly experience to leverage himself
- \* He boasted in his weakness

Elders are to be servant leaders, not rulers or dictators. That goes for individual leaders as well as elder teams. Elder teams must submit to each other in love and serve one another and the flock they serve. They learn to be transformed by the Holy Spirit in the process of submission to one another.