



## James 5:14a "The Elders of the Church"

April 17, 2016

### Text: James 5:14

- In times of sickness, the church is encouraged to "call the elders of the church." The word here in Greek for *elder* means a presbyter, or a pastor or elder of the church.
- These men are called to lay hands on the sick, and if it be the will of God, see recovery.
- But a question came to mind as I considered this verse: "Who are the elders of the church?"
- This may seem like a simple question, but there is a problem. Like the church has lost her **biblical** moorings on many things these days, so too has the biblical office of *elder/overseer/pastor* lost some of its meaning, esteem, and authority.
- Last December when we installed Pastor Profit, we reviewed "[The Principle of Authority](#)." I'd like you to review that message. Today, I'd like to take us back to the qualifications of biblical elders. I'd also like to review the responsibilities of the church towards them a bit more.
- Both of these areas are critical:
  1. If a church has *ungodly* elders and *obedient* people, that church has a **problem!**
  2. If a church has *godly* elders but a *disobedient* people, that church has a **problem!**
  3. The preferable situation we see described in the New Testament is a church with **godly** elders AND a **submissive** congregation!
    - *1 Thes 5:12-13 - We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*
    - *1 Tim 5:17 - Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*
    - *Heb 13:17 - Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
    - *1 Pet 5:5 - Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*
- In fact, one of the pressing concerns of the apostles as they established churches was the installation of overseers/elders/pastors in those churches, as Paul explained to Titus:

*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. (Titus 1:5-11)*

- The Acts narrative demonstrates the same mindset:

*When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:21-23)*

- More than just a laying on of hands, :) the biblical overseer or elder finds his primary roles in **teaching** and **protecting** the flock of God (Titus 1:9-11). Their ministry should produce **order**. (1 Cor 14:40)
- We are normally okay with the “teaching” part...not so much with the “protecting.” :)
- Yes, we have problems today with pastors who abuse their authority. I tremble for them when I consider the day of judgment! (Jam 3:1)
- But we also have an equal problem with many who simply won’t listen to those who God has place “over them in the Lord.” Just like preaching one thing and living another produces a negative impartation in the flock on the part of the preacher, likewise a **rebellious** flock hinders the work of the church and expansion of the Kingdom.
- The execution of this office (when done properly) is critical, because without such under-shepherds of the sheep, the flock is scattered! There is ALWAYS someone or someTHING trying to devour God’s precious people!

*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. (Acts 20:28-31)*

- Most people, including many pastors (me too!), don’t fully understand the **need** for such loving “oversight.” Showing great humility, the Apostle Peter wrote:

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet 5:1-4)*

### **The Elders of the Church, a Review:**

**1Ti 3:1** *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.*

**1Ti 3:2** *Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,*

**1Ti 3:3** *not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.*

**1Ti 3:4** *He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,*

**1Ti 3:5** *for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?*

**1Ti 3:6** *He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

**1Ti 3:7** *Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

The following can be found in greater detail in *The Playbook*: :)

1. He must live above reproach (v2).

- Being above reproach (literally “not able to be held”) means living a life where one cannot be easily or rightly accused of consistent wrongdoing, flagrant, or consistent sin.
2. He must be **faithful** to his wife (v2).
    - The ESV says: “the husband of one wife.” The Greek literally means “a one-woman man.”
    - Before he can be effective in the church, he must model Ephesians 5:25-32, as marriage is a visible model for our relationship with Christ.
    - The husband of one wife is obviously a man. The New Testament church elder is **male**. (1 Tim 2:11-14, Titus 1, 1 Cor 11, 1 Cor 14)
  3. He must be sober-minded, or temperate (v2).
    - This word can be understood as *watchful, alert or clear-headed*.
    - This speaks to the elder’s ability to think clearly regardless of the emotions of the moment, personal preferences, or external pressures. This is the sort of man that “stays in his lane” and does not allow the body of Christ to be “blown about by every wind and doctrine” (Eph 4:14).
    - Rather, he “keeps a close watch on himself and the teaching” (doctrine) and “persists in them” because he recognizes that temperance will “save both himself and those who hear him” from much stress and drama (1 Tim 4:16).
  4. He is self-controlled(v2).
    - This simply means he is **disciplined**. (1 Co 9:27)
    - Since leaders should be models for the church, an elder must set the example in all areas as best he can: family, money, faith, study, evangelism, and faith.
  5. He is respectable (v2).
    - This word literally means *orderly* in Greek. In other words, an elder leads an orderly, controlled life. There is little chaos, drama, or “gossip-worthy” activities going on!
    - This guy sounds pretty boring, but that is good!
    - Scripture declares that all believers should live, “a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.” (1 Ti 2:2-3)
  6. He is hospitable (v2).
    - This word in Greek literally means “to love strangers” and is in line with the Great Commission.
  7. He must be able to **teach** (v2).
    - Again, this is critical to his role. He must “lead and feed” the flock of God! (Jer 3:15)
    - He must reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching! (2 Tim 4:2)
    - He must not allow the Word of God to be lightly disregarded. (Titus 2:15)
  8. He must not be a drunkard (v3). Biblically, drunkenness is a sin (cf. Pr 23:20-21; Eph 5:18).
  9. He must not be violent (v3).
    - This literally means “not a giver of blows.” Although there is no biblical prohibition against coming to the rescue of someone in need or defending one’s family, an elder is not to be a fleshly fighter or brawler. He is not to react to circumstances with violence if it can be helped.
  10. He must not be quarrelsome (v3).
    - The overseer is always looking for ways to keep the peace and promote unity, although not at the cost of fidelity to God’s Word.

11. He must not be a lover of **money** (v3).

- An elder's life should demonstrate modesty, contentment, stewardship, giving, and balance in the area of money.
- It should be evident to all that his preaching and leading is not motivated by personal gain.
- Although the New Testament does not argue for poor preachers (thank God), it certainly makes no case for the unbalanced pursuit of or the flaunting of wealth by God's servants.

12. He must be a good **manager** of his home and a good father (v4-5).

- This is a tough standard, particularly in our age.
- An overseer must do everything he can to provide for his family, love his wife, and disciple his own children.

13. He must be mature in the Gospel, not a recent convert (v6).

- This speaks to having demonstrated depth and consistency in Christ.
- Putting a new believer in this level of leadership quickly exposes him to the pride trap, which apparently was Satan's downfall (cf. Isa 14:12-14; Eze 28:11-19).

14. He must have a good **reputation** (v7).

- Having a good reputation is the result of all the other skills and traits we have considered.
- Even though standing strong in the Word will always produce enemies on the outside, even most of an elder's enemies will respect his consistency, integrity, stewardship, and family life.

-----  
**Godly elders are just sinners saved by grace. Nevertheless, they are appointed by God to lead and serve His church, and are critical to the church, by design. The Elder/Pastor/Overseer:**

- ...is called to set a standard of honesty and integrity before God and His people.
- ...must be consistent in what he says and does.
- ...must handle the Word of Christ with extreme care and fidelity, refusing to take liberties with the text.
- ...must hold *truth* as the highest of core values because it is upon this that his ministry will be built.
- ...must be willing to die to himself, to fame, to fortune, and to pride continually in order to rightly serve Christ and His church.
- ...must pledge himself to veracity and uprightness.

**But the church too has responsibilities:**

- To submit to their teaching (1 Tim 4:11; Titus 3:8; Heb 13:17)
- To submit to their discipline (1 Cor 5; 2 Thes 3:6)
- To pray for them (1 Thes 5:25; 2 Thes 3:1)
- To support them financially (1 Cor 9:14; 1 Tim 5:18)
- To walk in unity, which blesses them (Php 2:1-3)
- To esteem them highly and love them (1 Thes 5:12-13)

So, as we call upon our pastors/elders for prayer and listen to their teaching, let us hold them up, pray for them, and insofar as they are saying what God says, submit to them, according to Scripture.

In Jesus' Name and for Jesus' glory alone. Amen.