

# The Church

## Elders - Solemnity of The Responsibility - Part 4

### Introduction

In the realm of Christian activity and functioning for God there are few works that should be approached with more reverential fear than that of being an overseer in a local church. Being a leader among the saints of God is not to be taken on lightly due to its solemnity and responsibility.

It is a very serious matter to have the responsibility of leading the flock of God. To teach the saints is a frightening responsibility, not only for the teacher (masters) (Jam. 3:1-2) but for the consequences, to the sheep. If the sheep are failing in nourishment, it may be because the leaders are giving bad food and destroying the flock. This was the problem Jeremiah spoke about (Jer. 12:10).

There is a possibility of this work being side-railed and involving determining those fit for baptism, entrance into church fellowship, organizing speakers, or deciding who to send money to, etc. That which often happens is elders are simply administrators who, in doing the work of deacons, fail to do the work the position requires. Their work is the spiritual guidance of the saints, consequently, they will be aware of the speakers who are coming and their fitness. In matters of money, determining dates for picnics, etc., others can do that.

### It Is a Sacred Responsibility

Being an elder in a local church is a sacred responsibility, the seriousness of which is seen by a number of avenues such as:

- 1) The qualifications required. Indeed, only men who have the qualifications ought to consider doing it.
- 2) The responsibility it carries for elders are accountable to God:
  - a) As stewards of the truth of God they are responsible for the preservation of the faith during their tenure.
    - i) When speaking of “the faith”, I am referring to that body of doctrine which concerns the cross of Christ; Christ Himself; the Church; and the Coming of the Lord. “The faith” is that body of doctrine taught in the scriptures, which was “once delivered” (Jude 1:3), never to be repealed or modified. This is the reason Paul pleaded with Timothy: “O Timothy, keep (guard) that which is committed to thy trust” (1 Tim. 6:20).
  - b) They are responsible to God on how the truths are outlived among the saints.
    - i) God puts great importance on obedience to the truth. It is not enough to profess to believe the truth. God does not give doctrinal truths for the sake of filling space in the scriptures, they are for our outliving them. As such, elders ought to be living examples of men who know the truth and live according to it. This is very important when dealing with the qualifications of elders. We cannot say we believe the truth and then modify the Biblical qualifications to suit a prevailing situation.
    - ii) Another observation is that there is something more important than having the saints simply fulfilling the letter of the scriptures. It is the spirit in which truth is practiced. John informed us that our Lord brought “grace and truth” (Jn.1:17), not grace without truth which results in liberalism. Neither is it truth without grace which results in cold hearted formalism. They must be in perfect balance, and elders are expected to be the personification of this balance. When there is this balance we see that truth set limits on the grace, and grace will give warmth to truth, and all must be done in love and consideration (1 Cor. 13:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:24-25).
  - c) They are responsible for the keeping of that gathering so precious to God, that is, the local gathering of saints. How precious is such a gathering to the Lord? That preciousness can only be measured by the value of the price that was paid for every saint in the fellowship. The local church is part of that

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corporate church which He, the Lord, “Purchased with His own Blood” (Acts 20:28). It was for the church corporate and therefore local that the Lord gave Himself for (Eph. 5:25). Elders are to work with God for the molding of the saints now, to that which they will be when they are presented to Him: “Not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph. 5:27). Each saint has been bought with a price, and that is the precious blood of the Lord, referred to as:

Quotation	Reference	Quotation	Reference
The blood of the Lord	1 Cor. 11:27	The blood of this just person	Matt. 27:24
The blood of Christ	1 Cor. 10:16	The blood of His cross	Col. 1:20
The blood of Jesus	Heb. 10:19	The blood of Jesus Christ	1 Pet. 1:2
The blood of Jesus Christ His Son	1 Jn. 1:7	The blood of the Lamb	Rev. 7:14
The blood of the new testament (covenant)	Matt. 26:28		

- d) The elders carry a very heavy responsibility because God will hold them accountable for who and what teaching they let into the gathering of the saints.
- i) First, that those considered for overseership have the right qualifications and have the care and discernment needed as much as possible to be sure those who join the fellowship are saved, and contrariwise those who are not saved don't come in.
  - ii) That they do not go beyond scripture in reception, neither do less than scripture demands in reception.
  - iii) That which is permitted to come into the fellowship has either a damaging, or beneficial effect, and the elders will be held accountable for that.
- Woe to the man who allows error to come among the saints of God, or the men who propagate the error of sectarianism. Blessed will the man be who seeks to build up the saints in divine truth, which promotes the binding of the saints, the beautifying of the saints, and the building up of the saints.
- e) They are responsible for the carrying out of discipline in the assembly. In every position of leadership, whither secular or spiritual, there are always dark situations one must face. One of the necessities of Biblical leadership is to know the various Biblical disciplines and how they are to be executed. Furthermore, there must be the avoidance of bias, either in excusing the individual or accusing them, and this means that there must never be the overlooking of the sin of an elder just because he is an elder. This I have witnessed multiple times.
- f) One of the works of elders after discipline is exercised is to seek the restoration of the one who did wrong. In the parable of the Lord, the shepherd went after that which was lost and did not stop until he found it (Lk. 15:4); the woman lit the candle and sought diligently until she found it (Lk. 15:8). However, in sharp contrast when the son went away, there is no mention in the parable of anyone ever going out and seeking for him! Every day they sat at a table with his empty chair. Never once do we ever read of them discussing him. He is left to languish in guilt and shame until he can pick up enough courage to go back. Then while the father welcomes him, the brother has no joy in his return, no joining in the festivities. What elders must ask themselves is how diligently do they go after the child of God who has wandered away, and are they left, and if the fallen one does pick up the courage to return, are they fully restored to the blessings of the fellowship or kept at a distance? Sadly, I am

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aware of so many who were hurt and left, who fell and were put out and were never sought after. There has been a failure in many cases to fulfill the exhortation of Galatians 6:1.

- g) They are responsible for the spiritual development of every saint. Having been with shepherds in the Shetland Islands and New Zealand, I have seen how they care for every sheep and lamb. They can tell how one is faring by how it walks, it's appetite, etc. He would be a very poor secular shepherd if he did not value every one of the flock. How much more ought the elders of an assembly be able to determine the spiritual health of every saint. The shepherd is to know them by name (Jn. 10:3) and if they are watching over the flock they will soon observe slippages. Being a leader of the saints of God is very serious as the following table tabulates:

How they are viewed	Reference	Responsibility
The church of God	Acts 20:28	The elders are responsible for caring for that which is precious to God
God's husbandry	1 Cor. 3:9	The elders are responsible for making and keeping it suitable for the blessing of God
God's building	1 Cor. 3:9	The elders are responsible for the building up of the saints in the things of God
The temple of God	1 Cor. 3:17	The elders are responsible for keeping the church spiritually clean, not by isolation, but biblical separation
The house of God	1 Tim. 3:15	The elders are responsible for the maintaining of truth among the saints
The flock of God	1 Pet. 5:2	The elders are responsible for the spiritual health of the flock
God's heritage	1 Pet. 5:3	The elders are responsible for the preservation of it's pristine excellencies

- h) They are responsible for the future of the assembly. When they allow unbiblical traditions to develop, or be maintained for the status quo, or be satisfied with the way the assembly is now, or make excuses about being in the day of small things, then that church is going down. One of the criteria for any church is to consider where it was spiritually ten years ago and where it is now. From that perspective questions need to be asked:
- i) If the local assembly continues on the same path as it has been these last years, where will it be in ten years from now?
  - ii) Has there been spiritual development?
  - iii) Is the attendance to the church meetings more or less than it was?
  - iv) Has there been an increase in people getting saved and going on or not?
  - v) Are we stuck in the rut of things fifty years ago, or are we changing methods but presenting the same truths?
  - vi) I see "gospel meetings" advertised, yet how few come irrespective of how much money is poured into them.

We need to face the fact that people today are not religious. Sunday is for sports, etc., and they live for the present not for eternity. Paul says: "I caught you with guile" (2 Cor. 12:16). How much more interested would people be in the pressing problems of the end of the world and the political world? It is a perfect opportunity for meetings on prophesy with the gospel woven into the messages. That is changing the method but not the message.

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### Old Testament Men To Whom God Gave Great Responsibilities

There are few men in the scriptures who were given a heavier responsibility than Moses, David, and Solomon.

- a) Moses was given the pattern of the tabernacle, a fact that was repeated (Ex. 25:9, 40; Num. 8:4; Heb. 8:5) so that there was no room for man's thoughts or ideology. It was that which God wanted for His dwelling place on earth, and it would only be His dwelling place if it was built exactly as God desired. It was very hard work, smelting gold, silver and copper, but that of an elder is even harder. Metals will conform to the master craftsman's skill, but people are much harder to mold. What a tragedy it would have been had Moses failed to fulfill the responsibility God had given to him.
- b) David was also given a pattern (1 Chron. 28:11, 12, 19) and he was responsible for conveying that pattern to another, namely Solomon his son. He also provided Solomon with all that was necessary for him to fulfill his role in the constructing of the temple.

There was only one pattern given for the tabernacle and temple, and the body of truth had been given once for all. It is the responsibility of elders to follow with as much exactitude as possible to the pattern God has given for a New Testament church, and provide a good foundation for those who follow to build on.

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

Rowan Jennings, Abbotsford, British Columbia