



Elder Qualifications Personal Discipline

Last issue we wrote about the elder's qualifications involving his personal character. Now we want to look at those qualifications involving personal discipline. A man cannot lead and shepherd others unless he has first learned to lead and shepherd himself. This is self-discipline. A youth once asked his father after being disciplined, "Who disciplines you?" The father replied, "I discipline myself."

It is abundantly clear from even a cursory look at the biblical qualifications for elders that this is a key requirement. There are four in particular that bring this into focus (from 1 Timothy 3:2-7, Titus 1:6-9).

Self-controlled

At the heart of personal discipline is self-control. An elder must be able to control himself, being characterized by a disciplined lifestyle. The old nature that tends toward laziness and excess is consistently suppressed. He does not live his life from moment to moment, based on the feelings of the flesh or as a reaction to immediate life circumstances around him. On the other hand, he is not governed by the "tyranny of the urgent," but rather by the "necessity of the important." Under-girding this is a consistent exercise of spiritual disciplines such as reading and meditating on scriptures, and

Biblical Foundations

Elders and Spiritual Gifts

by Jack Spender

Spiritual gifts are tools for service given to believers at the time of conversion. As divine enablements, they are essential for ministry within the body of Christ and are given by the Holy Spirit according to His sovereign will. Although there is disagreement among Christians about this subject, most would agree that it's a healthy sign when the people in a local church have some interest in the gifts and are discovering areas where they are gifted to serve, as well as areas where they ought to let others take the lead.

Since elders are stewards (Titus 1:7), it is important for them to understand and place sufficient value, not only on the believers, but also on the gifts they possess which God has provided for the smooth running of the local work. However, before elders can effectively cultivate the gifts of others, they must have some appreciation of their own giftedness.

With that in mind, I would like to think through in a series of articles the relationship of elders to spiritual gifts in three areas: 1) The personal gifts of individual elders, 2) Gifts

prayer. He takes the necessary steps to move truth from the mind and heart, to outward action.

Temperate, not addicted to wine

Self-control must be evident in the area of appetites. An elder must not be enslaved to alcohol, to be sure. But, also he should be free from all excesses and addictions, whether to food, drugs, the media or anything that begins to control his life. He must also be able to control his liberties for the sake of others.

Free from the love of money

An elder must be in control of his resources, rather than letting them control him. The issue really is loving what money can buy. An elder who forgoes the opportunity to amass material things to enable him to be generous toward others goes a long way toward influencing self-control and generosity in the lives of others.

Not pugnacious, not quick tempered

An elder must be in control of his emotions. A belligerence in difficult situations demonstrates failure in one of the most central aspects of self-control. Anger, in particular, can be one of the more evident and devastating emotions and needs to be kept in check appropriately.

within the group or board of elders collectively, and 3) The attitude of elders toward gifts in the local assembly and in the body of Christ overall.

Elders and their gifts

In considering the giftedness of the individual elder, 1 Corinthians 12 is clear that every elder has at least one spiritual gift, and that no one has all the gifts. A question is often asked: "Are there gifts that a man *must* have to be an elder?" A careful search of passages which list the qualifications

of elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-10) will show that for church leaders, the emphasis is clearly on the moral and character qualities of the man and his family rather than on special gifts or abilities. On this basis, it has often been stated that there are no spiritual gifts required for positions of leadership within the church.

Elder as teacher?

Two possible exceptions to this sweep-

... a bishop must be
blameless, as a steward
of God ... Titus 1:7 KJV

Practical Ministry

Plan For Recognizing New Elders

by Chuck Gianotti

How do you go about identifying whom God is raising up to be an elder in an existing church? For new churches we have the example of Paul and Barnabas appointing elders in every church (Acts 14:23) and Paul instructing Titus to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). Church planters and missionaries do this regularly.

But, in the case of established churches, little is said in Scripture about the method by which new elders are added to an existing group of elders. However, the Antiochan church of Acts 13:2-3 gives us a model for identifying spiritual leaders without relying on someone outside the church to appoint them.

In that Gentile congregation, we find the leaders *within* being used by God to recognize those He is raising up to leadership. The Spirit spoke while they were in worship, prayer and fasting to identify men for *“the work to which I have called them.”*

If such spiritual care and exercise was used in the case of identifying early missionaries, it seems wise to follow this pattern in identifying prospective elders today.

Using Acts 13:2-3 as a backdrop, one local church with which I was involved developed the following plan. This process could also be used for elders evaluating themselves.

Provide teaching

The elders began by teaching the congregation about biblical eldership. We informed them we were seeking God’s guidance for new elders.

Day of prayer and fasting

The elders scheduled a day for themselves as a group to get away for 24 hours of prayer and fasting. Meeting at a secluded location, we alternated 30 minutes of prayer and 15 minutes of break time. During each of these times, we focussed on one or two men in the fellowship, discussing their biblical qualifications and their suitability for the work of being an elder.

Then we spent considerable time in prayer for them, their families and

God’s guidance for our evaluation. Following a 15 minute break we repeated this process with more names. We prayed for every man in the fellowship and did not preclude anyone prematurely.

This process had a profound humbling affect on the elders present. The Holy Spirit began to speak to us of our own shortcomings in relation to the biblical qualifications. We prayed for each other as elders, as well as for the other men. Eventually, a short list of potential elders surfaced.

Involve the whole fellowship

We had invited the congregation to pray and fast during the same 24 hours. There was no special meeting place for this, but many incorporated prayer and fasting in their normal routine. We simply asked them to pray for the Lord

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 13:2-3 NIV

to impress upon them and the elders the men of His choosing. Later we asked those who participated to submit names they felt the Lord impressed upon them.

Elders meet again

The elders met again to review the submissions from the congregation and their own sense of the Lord’s leading. This led to a further refined list.

Elders meet with prospective men

Believing the Holy Spirit was leading them, the elders approached the prospective individuals to determine if they had a burden and desire for this great work. For those who were responsive, we arranged to meet with their wives as well—it is important to know whether the wives are of one mind with their husbands about pursuing this.

Provide training

By this time, the list of potential

elders was shorter than at the first. We invited the prospective men to meet with the elders in our regular meetings over a period of time. Simultaneously, we began to inform the congregation who was being considered. This gave the whole church an opportunity to give considered feedback.

The process should not be hurried, for 1 Timothy 5:22 tells us, *“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands...”*

Untold damage has resulted when men come into leadership without sufficient deliberation or preparation.

During this time a more thorough study of the subject of Biblical eldership would be profitable for the prospective elder. One elder could be assigned to mentor the individual, bringing him along on visitation and counseling (where appropriate). In practice, the mentoring elder will find himself coaching the potential elder in many aspects of the work.

Recognizing a new elder

At some point, the individual(s) is ready to be recognized as an elder. Only the Holy Spirit and the elders’ sense of the person’s

readiness can guide the decision as to when a man is ready. One thing is certain, there must be full unity among the elders about new elders. Without mutual confidence and respect, the resulting tension and conflict can easily paralyze the elders group as well as the entire fellowship.

Whenever we have added a new elder, we have had a simple “recognition” service, in which, echoing the words of Paul to the Ephesian elders, we commit the new elder in prayer to the Lord and the word of his grace (Acts 20:32). The congregation sees the solidarity of the elders and their identification with the new elder. The people, in turn, have opportunity to add their “Amen.”

This process is presented simply as an outline of what one church has done. Each assembly would be wise to determine their own method for identifying new elders God is raising up.

God's Word commands all believers to be hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9), but in a very real sense elders are told to be "given to hospitality" (1 Timothy 3:2). Our homes are to be open to the Lord's people, including those who may never be able to return the favor. As a godly wife, you can greatly enhance your husband's effectiveness as a leader by learning what biblical hospitality is and how it differs from the world's concept of entertaining. So often we get caught up in that mindset where we feel we must impress others with who we are and what we have, rather than focusing on serving others in their need and not trying to impress them with our performance.

When Jack and I first entered the Lord's work, I felt that to be hospitable meant I should always have a coffee cake tucked away in the freezer ready for a moments notice. We never knew when there might be a knock at the door and I remember how often I was frustrated by the unpredictability of such calls. Troubled people do not always need help at the most convenient times.

God gently worked to show me that the greatest obstacle to showing true hospitality was my unprepared heart, not an unprepared home! I'll never forget the day He tested my heart to see how well I had learned this lesson. A

family appeared on our doorstep on the day before I did my regular weekly grocery shopping. I literally had nothing "special" in the house to serve them until the Lord reminded me that there was a loaf of bread in the bread drawer. While one of my guests made toast, I brewed a pot of tea and we sat down to a wonderful time of fellowship around the kitchen table. After they left, I reflected on the incident and I was reminded that it wasn't what we

A bishop then must be ... given to hospitality ... 1 Timothy 3:2 KJV

had, but how we served it, that expressed biblical hospitality. Many times we do not feel ready to serve when the opportunity arises, but are we willing to ask the Lord to help us "seize the moment" and then move ahead to do what is right in spite of our feelings?

Years ago when we were putting a large addition on our home, a car pulled into the yard with unexpected out-of-state company—a family of six who wanted to stop by on their way through. Our only bathroom had been completely disassembled and with plaster dust and two young children running around, the house was in quite a state of disarray. "Oh Lord, not now," I pleaded. A feeling of panic began to

set in! We had not seen these folks in years. "Why not now?" a gentle voice asked. "Just forget about yourself and your dilemma. Welcome these saints and serve them with what you have." Needless to say, once I dealt with my feelings, I was able to enjoy my company. I learned that everyone can identify with a mess—who has not had one at some time in her life? If we can graciously welcome our guests rather than make them feel like an

inconvenience, everyone will have a wonderful time.

Who of us has not been a guest in someone else's home? Whenever you have that opportunity again, take special note of the things that make you feel comfortable as a visitor and seek to incorporate those ideas into your ministry of hospitality. As we seek the Lord's help in dealing with our pride and our inadequacies, we will find ourselves having an open heart and home policy. It is within our reach and great blessing always comes from obeying the commands of Scripture, including this one regarding hospitality. Your example will result in blessing to the rest of the assembly. In addition, you and your family will be enriched by those you have in your home. You will be teaching your children this lost art—and the joy of being a true helpmate will be simply an added bonus.

Now I must run. The doorbell just rang. ●

From The Q-Files

Lesson from the Marines

A few years ago when the draft fell behind in meeting their personnel quotas. For this reason, some recruiters get volunteers through their intelligence and physical exams. At

But then the roof fell in. A marine lost his life during combat drills. It appears requirements and allowed an unqualified man to enter this proud

When it comes to keeping the

church strong, God's Word clearly indicates that only spiritually qualified people should fill positions of service. The reason for this is to preserve the dignity and effectiveness of that body which the apostle Paul called "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). *Anonymous*

We spend more time discussing leaky toilets than why our church is slowly dying due to no growth or vision.

Frustrated elder

We have produced a generation of therapists, an army of counselors trained to do battle with problems they poorly understand because they have spent more time in classrooms becoming experts than in God's presence becoming elders. *Psychologist Larry Crabb in The Silence of Adam (Zondervan, 1994)*

Elders will be happiest when they can differ and yet lovingly honor the opinions and decisions of their fellow elder. *Anonymous*

ing conclusion should be considered at this point. Some hold that the phrase in I Timothy 3:2 “apt to teach” (“able to teach” NIV, NASB) and in Acts 20:28 the command “feed” (“shepherd” NASB) the flock of God...” imply that elders must possess the spiritual gifts of teacher or pastor respectively. Without lengthy digression at this point, we will consider briefly the strength of this view point.

The Greek word *didaktikon*, rendered “apt to teach,” is an adjective used only here and in II Timothy 2:24 of the servant of the Lord. It is different from the word *didaskalos*, a noun meaning “a teacher” as found in Ephesians 4:11 and I Corinthians 11:28. Paul employs a word of description rather than the name of a specific gift which he had already mentioned in earlier writings.

Further, in I Timothy 5:17, he refers to some within the eldership who are worthy to be regarded in a special way as ones “who labor in the word and doctrine.” For these reasons it is unlikely that Paul is including within the list of qualifications for elders the possession of the specific spiritual gift of “teacher.”

He is saying that all elders must be ready and willing to share their knowledge of spiritual truth whenever the need arises in the course of their work. In other words, not all elders are teachers by gift, but

all must be able to speak with wisdom about spiritual truth.

Elder as pastor?

As for feeding or shepherding the flock (Acts 20:28), it has become so ordinary a thing to refer to elders as shepherds, that many consider the words to be all but synonyms. We’ll look at this subject in greater detail later, but for now it will be sufficient to notice there are only two nouns used in the New Testament to describe the spiritual leaders of the church:

presbuteros--elder (Acts 14:23)
episkopos--overseer (or, bishop)
(Phil. 1:1)

Elders are certainly engaged in feeding and shepherding God’s flock, and so, in a general and collective sense, there is no harm in referring to them as shepherds (*Grk: poimen*). But strictly speaking, there is no reference to any *church leader* in the New Testament as a *poimen* (pastor, shepherd). In fact, the word is found only three times in the church epistles, twice referring to the Lord Jesus (Heb 13:20; I Peter 2:25).

In its only other occurrence (Eph 4:11) the expression “pastors and teachers” has been understood as describing either separate individuals or two gifts residing in the same person. The important thing to note here is that it is given, not in the context of church officials, but in the section on gifts given to men (4:7-10).

And so it can be said with confidence that although elders feed and care for sheep (i.e., do shepherding work) no Scriptures requires an elder to have the spiritual gift of “shepherd” or “pastor.” This should not seem incredible if we think of other spiritual gifts like faith or giving (I Cor. 12:9; Rom. 12:8) that are constantly exercised by elders but not necessarily special gifts they possess.

Conclusion

We can draw two conclusions that serve as a foundation to build on:

- 1) Every elder, as a Christian, has at least one spiritual gift.
- 2) No particular gift is a requirement for eldership.

To put this in another way, an elder (for that matter any believer) may “do the work of an evangelist” (II Tim. 4:5) without being an evangelist by gift. He might be “apt (or able) to teach” without being a teacher by gift, and he might “feed (or shepherd) the flock of God” without being a pastor by gift.

The reasons why these distinctions are very important will come into greater clarity when we consider part two of this series: “The gifts of the Spirit within the group or board of elders collectively.”

Finally, how wonderful is the truth that any brother in the Christian church who has a desire (I Timothy 3:1), and is qualified in his personal and family character can do elder work and not be disqualified from recognition by the congregation simply because he lacks a particular spiritual gift! ●

Elders SHOPNOTES

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Be shepherds of God s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers. 1 Peter 5:2a

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