

# Shepherd The Flock of God Among You



by Dale Rumble

## Frustration

In my travel to churches, I occasionally encounter pastors who are in the bonds of crippling frustration. They know something is wrong with their ministry; they are not fulfilled but are unsure what is missing. Change is needed; but what change? This tract has been written to address what I have often found to be back of such frustrations.

One example are men who find themselves constrained by the pressure and never-ending demands placed upon them as the church pastor. All administrative aspects of spiritual life in the church are their responsibility. Unfortunately, the Lord never called them to be pastors. Some He had called as evangelists, others as prophets and still others as apostles. They love the Lord, and desire to serve him according to the anointing He has given them, but tradition has forced them into the role of being “the pastor.” The result is frustration!

A second example are men, who as true pastors, recognize their limitations and inability to properly motivate, equip and care for all the sheep under their charge. The immensity of this need is a frustrating demand for greater performance through sermons, methods, committees and techniques.

These two examples of frustration have their origin in tradition that arose in the church centuries ago, when biblical principles of shepherding were exchanged for methods and principles of government used in the

world. What works in secular institutions and enterprises is not suitable for the church which is a theocracy. This is the issue I seek to address.

## What is the Answer?

First, we need to understand all that is implied in the command, “Shepherd the flock of God.” The answer to our inquiry can be found by a careful study of the following New Testament scriptures.

### 1. John 10: 1-18; John 21:15-17 (Peter’s commission by Jesus)

A shepherd can only love the Lord’s sheep to the extent that he loves the Lord. Out of that love, he will feed and nourish the young and the old. He will help the weak and sickly. He will teach them to know the voice of the Lord. He will tend, counsel and care for them, while guarding them from spiritual wolves and heresy. He will disciple them with patience. Redemptive discipline is an inherent component of godly oversight. He will do all these things, not for the sake of being paid, but because he loves them enough to lay down his life for them.

### 2. 1 Peter 5:1-3 (As an elder in Jerusalem, Peter commissions other elders)

Elders are to willingly exercise oversight of spiritual things in a local church. They are to do so regardless of how well they are paid. They are not to dominate, control, manipulate or “lord it over” those under their charge. Their personal lives are to be examples of godly righteousness to the flock.

### 3. 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9 (Paul’s charge to Timothy and Titus concerning the ordination of elders)

Elders are not to be novices, but men whose personal lives have proven to be above reproach, both inside and outside the church. Their families and home lives should exemplify those community qualities that Christ seeks to manifest in His church. Regardless of what other spiritual gift he may have, an elder must be able to teach the word of God, feeding the flock and guarding them from heresy.

### 4. Acts 14:23; 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; James 5:14; Hebrews 13:17

These scriptures make it clear that in the early church, established assemblies were under the oversight of a plural company of men called elders. These men were set in place by the apostles with authority to oversee and care for the church. There was no thought of their authority being vested in a title (Matthew 23:8-12). There is

not record in scripture of an established church being overseen by one man, either a pastor, senior pastor or priest, nor of it being a democracy.

5. Ephesians 4:11-13 (The purpose and commission of ascension gift ministries to equip the saints for their work of service)

The question that must be faced at this time is, “How can elders oversee, feed, guard, care for, disciple and lead the flock of God if another group of men (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) are to equip them for service?” One cannot be equipped to minister in a spiritual location apart from also being equipped with the character to do so. It becomes apparent that the equipping process is inherently an integral part of shepherding. The two functions *cannot* be separated!

The conclusion leads to an additional qualification for men to be elders. The grace of God for one of these ministries should rest upon each candidate. Every member of Christ’s body has been called by the Lord to a unique role of service for which he (or she) must be equipped (Romans 12:1-16). A key word describing the ministry required to equip the saints for service is “diversity.”

- Pastors are needed to care for the saints, and to teach and equip them by example to care for and love one another in godly relationships.
- Teachers are necessary so that the saints are taught about the Lord and His ways, and are equipped to instruct, encourage and edify each other.
- Evangelists will impart the Lord’s heart of compassion for the lost and equip the saints to evangelize.
- Prophets have grace to hear and express the heart of God to individuals and congregations. The grace upon them will equip the saints to become a prophetic people in the Lord.
- The glory of tomorrow arises out of the vision of today. For this reason, apostles are needed to understand and communicate the purpose of God for the church. Understanding His purpose, they will lay proper foundations for the church and help equip the saints, building them together on these foundational truths (1 Corinthians 3:10-13; Ephesians 2:19-22).

Thus, a great diversity of ministry is required in an eldership to equip the saints they oversee to become a living expression of the body of Christ. The purpose that God has planned for His church is ideally fulfilled

if every member is equipped for service in assemblies where Jesus is functionally Head, where unity is based on humility, where ministry comes from the hearts of servants and where fellowship flows out of the love of God.

Considering the need for diversity, elders must be open to the input of translocal ministries as well as being quick to train new men in the congregation who have the calling to become elders. They will stand together as one man, not in a hierarchical relationship; but always recognizing the grace upon each other, they will govern the assembly by consensus with an emphasis on accountability. Their unity will not be based on conformity, but on diversity in submission; unity of purpose with diversity of function. The most important ingredient will always be godly character. This is vitally important since elders will generally not be equal in visibility, experience, stature or pulpit ministry. If one of them cannot accept admonition from the others he should lay down his leadership.

Great trust will be required as each one learns to defer on issues where the grace of another will be greater. There should always exist a godly tension between caring for the flock and releasing teams and individuals to translocal outreach. Elders are not called to simply make decisions, but to hear God and obey. To this end, they will frequently hear His voice in the words of the people, including their own wives.

## Developing an Eldership

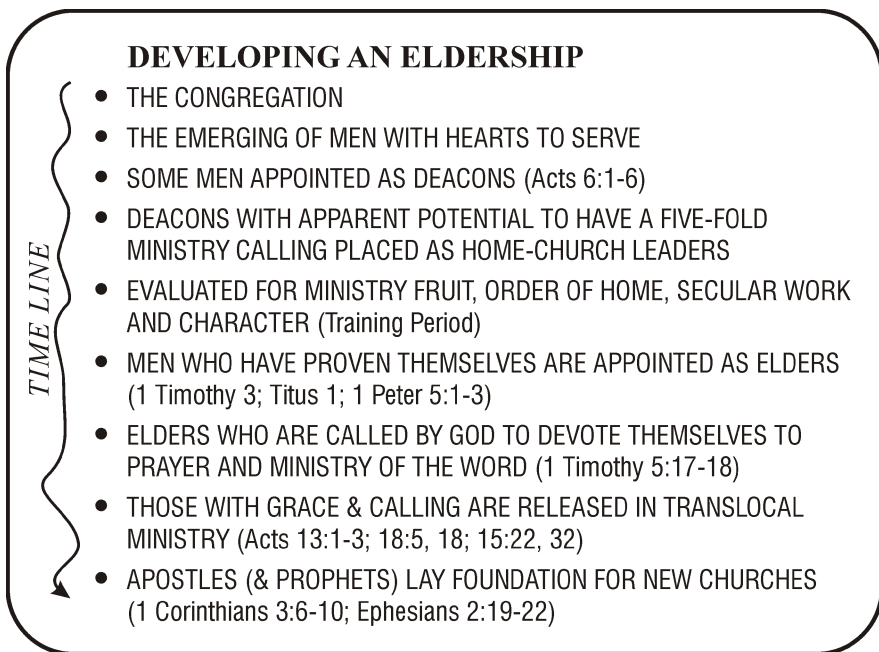
Servants. All ministry in a church begins here: hearts seeking to serve others in response to the love they have experienced in Christ. God calls all of us to be servants; from servants He chooses leaders. Not leaders who serve, but servants who will lead by example. Men who exercise the gentle authority of servanthood are men to whom He will entrust His sheep (Matthew 20:25-28).

Any ministry to which God calls a man to serve has both a grace and a sphere associated with it. If one proves faithful and fruitful in his sphere, God may, in time, extend grace for a larger dimension of service. For one to assume a wider sphere without His grace will only lead to failure. Such failure can arise out of a carnal desire in leaders to control what God is doing. What one builds in ministry he can destroy by sin or cripple by presumption. Thus, the condition of one's heart is always vitally important since public ministry is an expression of our personal life.

The following are pertinent spheres of evaluation in the training, selecting and ministry of elders. These can involve many years of time.

- His oversight of domestic affairs, including the material and spiritual provision for his family
- His willingness to serve in menial/non-personal assignments in church life
- His social and moral reputation in the community
- His stewardship in secular employment
- His oversight of a small (“cell”) group of believers
- His oversight as an elder while also continuing in secular work
- His oversight as an elder while being financially supported by the church
- His translocal-sphere of service in which he serves according to the ministry grace that rests upon him

The following chart illustrates how these spheres may occur over time in a local church.



# God's Seminary

The local church is God's seminary, being the place where His life originates in new converts, where it is developed and then propagated to new locations. Elders oversee this seminary.

Paul spent three years at Ephesus training elders for that church. Details of his equipping process is revealed in Acts 20, verses 17 through 38. Paul had later returned to Ephesus and challenged the elders by reminding them how he had taught and disciplined them. The following describes his training agenda record of what he emphasized in this review:

- His exhibited humility and faithfulness during trials and persecution (verse 19).
- He exemplified the total completeness of what he taught them (verse 20 and 27).
- The thrust of his preaching focused on extending the kingdom of God through proclaiming grace, repentance and faith. Evangelism was of primary importance (verse 21 and 25).
- His ministry addressed both public audiences as well as smaller house groups (verse 20).
- He had supported himself by secular work, demonstrating that his goal for ministry was not material gain. Furthermore, he had challenged them to follow his example (verses 33 through 35).
- He stressed the importance of their service as overseers, reminding them of how he had exhorted them with tears that they constantly guard their hearts against pride (verses 28 through 30). At no time did he suggest that one of them occupied a place of "final authority" over the other elders.
- He reminded them of his tearful admonitions over the three year period to be faithful, humble men, who stand together as one in caring for the flock, not seeking to draw disciples after themselves and thus scattering the sheep (verse 30 and 31).

There is an implicit authority in any ministry of the Spirit. The issue is not whether we have sufficient authority for the task God has called us to, but rather, how we are to conduct ourselves so that the authority of our ministry is received. Authority has no value if it is not accepted by those whom it is to serve. Elders must exercise oversight so that it will be well received by the flock.

Again, we have an example from God's seminary of how this should be accomplished. In 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 1 through 13, Paul reviews for the church at Thessalonica how he had conducted himself so that particular assembly would recognize and accept his apostolic input. Actually, Paul's task was twofold: to establish foundations of the church, and at the same time, train the two younger apostles who accompanied him (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6). Paul's words are applicable to all believers, but they are especially important for elders. The following review reveals the supreme importance he placed on godly character:

- He avoided all appearance and acts of greed (verse 5).
- He did not flatter the people or seek honor because of his ministry reputation (verses 5 and 6).
- He was gentle with the people, much like a nursing mother would care for her child (verse 7).
- He supported himself by secular work, laboring night and day in order to preach the gospel without charge (verse 9).
- He lived a devout, blameless and exemplary life before the people whom he taught (verses 8 and 10).
- He exhorted, implored and encouraged the saints much as a father would his own children (verse 11).

Paul thanked God that, because of the humility and total commitment he had demonstrated in serving the people, they endorsed the validity of his apostolic ministry by receiving his words as the word of God!

His example provides the pattern for elders to follow in exercising the authority of oversight. No one should assume he has such spiritual authority simply because he bears a title or occupies an office.

## Conclusion

Many of the frustrations that church leaders face today can be resolved by a return to these biblical principles of shepherding found in the New Testament. Such principles are not only applicable to the eldership of a local church, but can generally be applied, at least in part, to the relationship between church pastors in a locality.

Indeed, scripture references to local bodies in the early church imply the inclusion of all believers at a locality. Thus, as God restores the church, uniting assemblies for the great task of harvest that lies ahead, leaders should be open to embracing new challenges in trust and accountability

with one another. There is great need for the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21-24 to be answered, so that believers in every locality will flow together as one body in His service.

***Lord, bring this to pass!***



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