

Last week in beginning to consider the vital and necessary subject of church officers, we identified two sanctioned offices, elder and deacon—these are the only two authorized officers within Christ’ church and any other office imposed upon the church must be either questioned or rejected—and so we come in the second place to describe the basic responsibilities of these two offices—tonight I want to describe those responsibilities peculiar to elders leaving next week those that concern the deaconate...

Ted Donnelley—“Too many pastors are in trouble. Some are bewildered by conflicting expectations. Do their congregations want them to be teachers, administrators, psychiatrists, social workers or just everyone’s friend? Are they meant to fulfill all these roles at once? Physical breakdown and nervous strain have taken their toll of others. Not a few have left the pastorate altogether, disillusioned with the calling upon which they had entered so expectantly. There is a crisis of confidence in ministerial ranks...”

It’s my understanding that much of the confusion we find in our day is due a lack of understanding with reference to the duties assigned by Scripture to the office of elder—what is their fundamental and foremost duties responsibilities—thus what I intend to do tonight is provide three general duties or responsibilities of elders, suggesting several individual things under each point...

But before I do that I want to begin with a few clarifications—[1] if you recall last week in considering 1Tim. 5:17, I suggested to you that while all elders must be able to teach they may not all equally teach—that is, not every elder will be set aside to labor full time in word and in doctrine—thus in explaining the responsibilities of elders I am focusing primarily on their duties in general without clarifying that every elder may not be responsible for every duty to the same degree, yet, this in no way denies that every elder is responsible for every duty to varying degrees...

But a [2] clarification concerns the difficulty of outlining or distinguishing the various duties—for example, I will attempt to do this under three activities—[a] ministering the word of God, [b] overseeing the people of God, and [c] leading the church of God—but as we shall see there’s much overlap between these three—for how else does he oversee and lead the people but by ministering the word of God—thus there is a sense in which I can summarize the whole of the elders of duties under the single imagery of shepherd or pastor—as a shepherd he is to feed the flock, oversee their health, protect them from harm, all the while, exercising a loving authority of them...

It may be this reason why in Eph.4:11 in describing the various temporal offices of apostle, prophet, and evangelists, he then described the one lasting office as pastor teacher—as if to say, that this single title does well to summarize all that an elder does—he pastors or shepherds the sheep—and there is a sense in which all that he does he does as a shepherd of the flock—yet I want to consider the various responsibilities of elder under three general headings...

- I. Elders minister the word of God
- II. Elders oversee the people of God
- III. Elders lead the church of God

I. Elders minister the word of God

1. The practice of referring to the pastor or elder as “the minister” has biblical warrant—it’s taken from the OT imagery of the priests who were assigned to minister or serve in the temple...
2. 1Cor.9:13-14—“do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple...even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel...”
3. Here the apostle makes a comparison between the priests of the old covenant and ministers of the new—they both ministered the things of God from which they made their livelihood...
4. Notice—“those who minister the holy things [old covenant ministers]...” are equated with—“those who preach the gospel...”

5. They both are to labor or minister within the temple—under the old covenant this meant performing the various duties associated with the temple, while new covenant ministers labor within the spiritual temple of church...
6. Rom.15:16—“because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God...”
7. NIV—“to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God...”
8. The point being—central to the office of elder is the responsibility to minister to the people the pure word of God...
9. John Owen—“The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word...this feeding is of the essence of the office of a pastor, as unto the exercise of it; so that he who does not, or can not, or will not feed the flock is no pastor, whatever outward call or work he may have in the church...”
10. Jer.3:15—“and I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding...”
11. Notice several things—[a] shepherds are given to the church by Christ—“I will give you shepherds...”—that is I will give gifts of shepherds...
12. What was here promised we find fulfilled in Eph.4:11—“and He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...”
13. Notice [b] shepherds have hearts similar to Christ’s—“shepherds according to My heart [or shepherds after My heart]...”
14. This means they will have hearts for Christ and for His sheep—there motivation will be to glorify Christ in feeding His sheep...
15. Notice [c] shepherds are given to feed the sheep—“who will feed you with knowledge and understanding...”
16. Jn.21:15—“Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord: you know that I love you. He said to him, Feed my lambs...”
17. Here we have first of three questions given by Christ to Peter, v16—“do you love me...” v17—“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me...”
18. Notice having asked this question three times, our Savior then provides this threefold exhortation—“feed my lambs” (v15) “tend my sheep” (v16), and “feed my sheep” (v17)...
19. In verses 15 and 17 our Savior uses the same Greek word meaning “to feed” in v16 he uses another word meaning “to tend or shepherd...”
20. The point being, one essential way in which the sheep are shepherded is that they are feed with knowledge and understanding...
21. Thus having stated and proved the general principle that a primary duty of elders is to minister the word of God I want to here descend to three particulars...
22. Notice [1] elders must faithfully minister the word of God—by this I mean they must speak the whole word to the whole people...
23. Elders are not foremostly to seek the acceptance and approval of the people, but to remain faithful to the Biblical text...
24. 2Tim.4:2—“preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching...”
25. This means that ministers may say things that are not always pleasant to hear—he may at times say things that are very difficult to hear...
26. Prov.27:6—“faithful *are* the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful...”—now this is not to say that the preacher should mean, rude, or crude...
27. But all I’m simply saying is that his primary concern is not what people say or think of him, but is he being faithful to the Scriptures and to His Master...
28. Thus in order for an under-shepherd to faithful minister the word, he must craft his sermons with individual people in mind...
29. Ted Donnelly—“A sign of a good pastoral preacher is that he finds it difficult to preach elsewhere a sermon originally composed for his own congregation. This is because his sermons are tailor-made. He

- prepares with gingival customers in mind and always cuts the cloth of exposition and application to suit them exactly...”
30. Ted Donnelly—“His preaching will be pastoral preaching. As he prepares sermons, his people will be constantly before him. He is not interested in producing magnificent pieces of biblical interpretation for their own sake. His goal is more practical—to point sinners to the Savior, guide the perplexed and strengthen the burdened...”
 31. Notice [2] elders must diligently minister the word of God, 2Tim.2:15—“be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth...”
 32. Ministers of the gospel must give themselves to the tedious study of the Scriptures laboring to rightly understand and apply it to the people...
 33. Thus the apostle describes such in 1Tim.5:17—“those who labor in the word and doctrine...”—the NAS has it—“they who work hard at preaching and teaching...”
 34. I think sometimes people can get the faulty idea that preaching is easy—that all is needed is to spend a few hours reading some commentators and put together a sermon...
 35. But my friends, I hope that such a foolish notion doesn’t exist in this church—no the Scriptures describe the work of the elder with reference to the Scriptures as laborious...
 36. May I here take a few minutes and make an application—fewer things more sadden a preacher than to spend hours on a given message or application tailoring it for a specific person only to find then absent for the service...
 37. How do you think a lady would feel if she spent hours preparing a meal—every aspect tediously prepared with love and affection...
 38. Only to have her husband and children decide they would rather have McDonalds—how do you think she would feel as she serves her meal to an empty table...
 39. Well my dear friends I want to think of this—how do you think a pastor feel’s whose labored hours upon a message—specifically crafted with a certain person in mind...
 40. And then when he comes into the pulpit to serve his family, he notices that certain people have chosen rather to be elsewhere...
 41. Notice [3] elders must prayerfully minister the word of God, Acts 6:4—“we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word...”
 42. This statement is found in the context of what many believe to the origin of Deacons—the physical growth of the church had brought with it several practical needs...
 43. Thus the 12 apostles summoned the multitude of the disciples, saying—“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables...”
 44. V3—“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom; but [v4] we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word...”
 45. The word translated “give ourselves continually to” is a single Greek word meaning—“to be constantly devoted...”
 46. Notice the apostles were devoted to two things—[1] prayer, and [2] the ministry of the word—that is to say they were committed to the prayerful study and proclamation of the word of God...
 47. John Owen suggests five primary things in which elders are to pray for—[a] the success of the word, [b] the temptations that the church is generally exposed to, [c] the especial state and condition of all the members, [d] the presence of Christ in the assemblies of the church, and [e] their preservation in faith, love, and fruitfulness, with all the duties that belong unto them...

II. Elders oversee the people of God

1. Closely related to ministering the word, is the oversight of the people of God—elders are to keep a close eye upon the sheep...
2. Ted Donnelly—“The duties of shepherding and overseeing provide a perfect balance. A minister who does not feed his people in love has no moral right to supervise their lives. Anyone, on the other hand, who does not oversee, who is not personally involved with and informed about his sheep, is in no position to feed them properly. He does not deserve the name of pastor...”

3. 1Pet.5:1-3—“the elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock...”
4. Notice three phrases [a]—“shepherd the flock of God...”—to shepherd means to tend or care for—it here refers to the overall and general oversight of the sheep...
5. Notice [b]—“which is among you...”—who are the elders to care for but for a specified flock in which they themselves dwell...
6. We find the same thing in v3—“those entrusted to you...”—which is to say, every pastor or elder has been entrusted with a specific flock—a flock which can be clearly defined...
7. Notice [c]—“serving as overseers...”—the word translated “oversee” literally means to—“to look carefully or to inspect...”
8. It here refers to the way in which the elder is to shepherd the flock—“shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers...”
9. John Brown—“The shepherd has but imperfectly done his work when he has procured for, and administered to, his flock wholesome nourishment. He must watch over them; he must not allow either wolves or goats to mix with them, and, should such find their way among them, he must use appropriate means to get rid of them; he must endeavor to prevent the sheep from straying, and, when they do wander, he must employ every proper method to bring them back; he must endeavor to preserve them from the attacks of disease, and administer suitable preventives and medicines for prevailing maladies...”
10. Notice [1] elders oversee the general unity of the church—by this I mean they are to be watchful for anything that might disrupt the harmony of the people...
- 11.
12. Notice [2] elders oversee the general safety of the church—by this I mean elders are to remain on the alert for false teaching and teachers...
13. Acts 20:28—therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood...”
14. Verses 29-30—“for I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves...”
15. Notice the apostle anticipates two sources of error—[a] from without, v29—“after my departure savage wolves will come in among you...”
- 16.
17. Notice [b] from within, v30—“also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves...”
18. Thus the oversee most not only be on the alert for false teaching that originates outside the church but also to that doctrine being taught within the church...
19. Every thing being taught both publicly and privately must be overseen—SS material, book studies, discipleship—these are to be overseen by the eldership...
20. Notice [3] elders oversee the personal health of the church—by this I mean he must know the present spiritual health of the church in general and each individual sheep in particular...
21. Ted Donnelly—“How does a shepherd ‘oversee’ his sheep? He comes close to them and examines them. He looks for cuts, lameness or parasites. He runs his hands through a sheep’s fleece, holds up its head and gazes deeply into its eyes, watching for signs of malnutrition or disease. Without a careful, frequent study of each animal he simply cannot do his work. The sheep itself may not always welcome this close inspection and may try to wriggle free. But the shepherd is not being aggressive or intrusive. He is motivated, rather, by love and concern. He is there to help and overseeing is an essential part of that helping process...”

III. Elders lead the church of God

1. Elders have a God-given authority within the church and so must lead or rule it by His word and in His stead...

2. 1Thess.5:12-13—“and we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves...”
3. 1Tim.5:17—“let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine...”
4. Heb.13:7—“remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct...”
5. Verse 17—“obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you...”
6. The word here translated “rule” is rendered “governor” in Acts 7:10—“and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house...”
7. In being made governor or ruler over Egypt Joseph was given a real and true authority—an authority that entailed making decisions...
8. Matt. 2:6—“but you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel...”
9. We here have a quotation from Micah 5:2—out of Bethlehem, shall come a Ruler [a Governor], who will shepherd God's people Israel...
10. This Ruler will also be a Shepherd—He will possess absolute authority over the church and will pastor them as the Good Shepherd...
11. This of course refers to Christ—the Elder, Overseer, and Pastor of His people—He will gently yet really lead the people...
12. Thus elders possess a real and delegated authority within the church—they have a responsibility to administer a real rule within the church beneath Christ the Ruler of the church...
13. But to be specific, notice [1] elders lead the church in the ways of God—by this I mean they are to direct the overall progress and practices of the church...
14. For example, they must guard the worship of the church ensuring that nothing is ever brought into it that has not been expressly commanded by God...
15. The under-shepherd must possess the disposition of his Master, who said in Jn.2:17—“Zeal for thy house has eaten Me up...”
16. Notice [2] elders lead the church in the ordinances of Christ—by this I refer to the only two sacraments given by Christ to the church—baptism and the Lord's Table...
17. Elders must guard the ordinances insuring that none get them but those who give reasonable evidence of being a sheep of the flock...
18. Notice [3] elders lead the church in admission of membership—elders must ensure that none are admitted into the church but sheep...