

# The Work of Elders: Teaching and Protecting

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*Detailed Outline*

*Part 8 of 9*

## II. Defining Pastoral Oversight by a Plurality of Qualified Elders

### C. New Testament Roles for Pastoral Elders

The general New Testament concept of the eldership is the shepherd concept, not the board concept. There are four specific aspects to the shepherding task: feeding, protecting, leading, and caring/healing.

Sheep are dependent on people. They are not able to care for themselves. They are an excellent example of how we are totally dependent upon God for our lives.

#### 1. Teaching (Feeding) the Church

a) This is the proactive side of the ministry.

1) No food means no growth. No food means no flock.

2) In many ways this is the most important job of shepherd elders. We as elders need to be able to feed God's Word, the Bread of Life, to God's people.

b) In the Old Testament, we see that the priests, elders, and kings failed in many cases to feed the people of Israel from the Law of God.

1) Hosea, the prophet, cried out,

*"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6a ESV)*

2) Ezekiel also denounced Israel's leaders for not feeding the people, but feeding only themselves:

*"Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?" (Ezek. 34:2b)*

3) The prophet, Jeremiah, prophesied that God would some day give Israel good shepherds who would teach and instruct the people. These are shepherds after God's own heart:

*"And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." (Jer. 3:15)*

c) In the New Testament, it is amazing how much teaching is emphasized. The gospel is news, and it has to be taught to people, along with the doctrines included in it.

- 1) The early church in Acts was characterized by preaching and teaching.
  - 2) The Great Commission says, “Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Teaching is part of the Great Commission, and it is a major part of the work of an elder.
- d) This is why all pastor elders must be able to teach the Word and protect the church from false teachers (Titus 1:9-10). And as we have already seen, some elders labor in preaching and teaching. Their labors should be recognized and rewarded (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

*“If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching, it is safe to say that it is the religion of Jesus Christ.” (James Orr, The Christian View of God and the World)*

- e) The future preparation of elders and teachers in our churches is crucial. We have become far too passive about this and have handed it off to Bible schools and seminaries.
- 1) Paul told Timothy to take the deposit of the gospel and entrust it to people who are faithful and can teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). This is passing on the gospel to the next generation, and training future leaders for the church.
  - 2) I have observed that churches who have a good eldership and a good leadership body have done a lot of training. They have prepared men, taught them doctrine, tested their doctrine, put them in positions to serve, and they’ve worked with them. So they have elders who they know they have trained well.
- f) In Acts 20, Paul is speaking to the Ephesian elders. He tells them,
- “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27)*
- He says, I have taught you the whole message of salvation, from Genesis to Revelation. I held back nothing. Now you men do the same thing! We must teach the whole counsel of God.

## 2. Protecting the Church

Sheep easily get lost. They cannot protect themselves either. In fact, when attacked by a bear or wolf, they can get so scared that they fall over and die.

One major aspect of the elders’ work is the protecting, guarding, and watching ministry. It is emphasized in all the major passages on eldership (Acts 20, 1 Peter 5, Titus 1).

### a) From False Teachers

- 1) The archenemy of the church is the false teacher.

*“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.” (Acts 20:29-31)*

Paul is saying that wolves will draw the flock after themselves and devour them. But also, he says that false teachers will arise from among the elders! So we must be watchful and alert. We cannot fall asleep or the sheep will be taken away!

(a) Experts in the cults are saying that there is an explosion of aberrant teaching even among the Bible-believing evangelical community.

(b) A friend of mine was at a conference and was talking to a world-renowned theologian. My friend asked where the main attacks on Christian doctrine were coming from. The theologian sighed and said, "They are coming from every direction. Every single doctrine is under attack."

2) An elder who cannot protect the flock from false teaching is a danger to the flock.

(a) I grew up in a very liberal denomination. I used to say, "If it's Christian, they deny it." But at one point in this denomination's history, they were very orthodox. I would have agreed with 90% of what they taught.

(b) How did they turn away from apostolic, orthodox doctrine? How did they become basically secularists with a candy-coating of religion called Christianity?

(c) The elders didn't guard the flock. They didn't know their Bibles. They didn't know Christian doctrine. When the wolves came in, they didn't have the courage to stand up to them or correct their false teaching.

(d) If as an elder you are unable to protect the church, defend sound doctrine, and be a guardian of the gospel, the best thing you can do for your church is resign.

b) From Internal Fighting

1) One of the biggest problems in our churches is Christians fighting with each other! We can be very mean and ugly in conflict.

2) Sheep kick, and can hurt one another. Sometimes they get completely out of control.

3) You need to be an elder who can resolve conflict, make peace, show forgiveness, and help people work through their difficulties.

c) From Sin

1) I think the hardest job of being an elder is to protect the church from sin and dealing with church discipline.

2) This is emotionally draining and stressful. It has caused many men to leave Christian ministry.

3) But it is part of being an elder! We have to protect the church from sin!

- 4) If you leave sin to deal with later, it will be far worse. Many churches are in the bonds of sin because no one has ever dealt with sin.
- d) Protecting the flock takes great courage.
- 1) I think of the story of David (1 Sam. 17:34-36). He was only a teenager, watching his father's flock, when a bear came. David killed the bear. Then a lion came, and David killed the lion.
  - 2) Do you have that kind of courage to protect God's flock? Will you know the truth and stand for it?