
Words of Truth

Should Not The Shepherds Feed The Flock?

By: Brian A. Yeager

Here in El Paso we are working hard to help the congregation here have qualified elders (I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9) in the future. We know this is not something we are close to. However, it is certainly the will of the Lord that there be qualified elders in every congregation. Notice: *“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed”* (Acts 14:23).

Elders have some significant responsibilities. Notice a few: *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you... The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock”* (Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:17, and I Peter 5:1-3).

You would think that the work of elders is clear enough through the qualifications and through the Scriptures you just read. However, churches of Christ today have greatly perverted the work of elders. Congregations have appointed elders to do works that the Scriptures say nothing of, which is sinful (Acts 15:22-24, Galatians 1:6-12, Colossians 3:17, and Revelation 22:18-19). For example, there are false elders overseeing: Youth Ministry, Facility Management, Family Ministry, Worship Ministry, Lads To Leaders/Leaderettes, Administration & Finance, Education Ministry, Community Service, Meals on Wheels, Disaster Response, and Zone Ministry (<http://www.creekwoodcc.org/eldersdeacons.htm>). The elders are disqualified based on the fact that they are part of a congregation doing all of those things that the Scriptures speak nothing of. We have to keep in mind that these things have happened to churches of Christ. We have to teach our young men right so that they do not grow to be fake elders over fake churches.

Many elders are just figureheads and puppets for preachers. Preachers will appoint men they know they can control or influence to keep the church moving in their favor. Remember, false teachers look at brethren like they are merchandise (II Peter 2:1-3). We have to keep this in mind as a congregation as well. Most importantly, YOU (each member of this congregation) have to be sure I am not trying to appoint men in the future that will be my “stooges”. Thus, we have to make sure that the young men we are training up are capable of standing and opposing anything contrary to the truth (Titus 1:9-14). If we appoint men who cannot properly shepherd the flock, the church here will have generations of trouble to follow. We do not want shepherds like Israel who caused much more harm than good.

Israel's Shepherds As An Example Of What Not To Have In Elders

We know that the Old Testament is not our law (Romans 7:1-6, Ephesians 2:11-17, Colossians 2:4-14, and Hebrews 9:15-17). However, we can learn a lot of lessons by studying the Old Testament (Romans 15:4 and I Corinthians 10:1-12). Remember, all of the Scriptures are profitable to us (II Timothy 3:15-17).

Among those many lessons is this text concerning shepherds: *“And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them”* (Ezekiel 34:1-10).

Lest we miss the point, understand that if our efforts to turn out qualified men to serve as elders turns out failures, the future of this congregation will be like you just read. Incapable or uncaring spiritual leaders will cause the congregation here to fail (Isaiah 3:12, Isaiah 9:16, Isaiah 56:10-12, and Matthew 15:14). While I am working with our young men to help them to be capable teachers, YOU need to step up too. Whatever you perceive to be lacking in these young men we are working with, help them to see it and learn. This is not my effort, but OUR effort as a congregation. If I take it on alone these men will not be successful in the future. I am focusing on helping them to be teachers. That is my skillset. Where can you apply your abilities to help them to be well-rounded shepherds in the future?

Conclusion

If our elders in the future here fail to feed and protect the flock, we (all members of this congregation) will have some degree of blame in that. Every part of the body is supposed to be working together (Ephesians 4:16). Even if you say or do nothing toward the future, that inaction [complacency] itself is a cause of which failure will arise (Haggai 1:1-11). We are years away from an eldership. Let's use those years wisely. Let's focus on training up multiple generations of future leaders here in El Paso. We have no elders now because of failures, yes failures, of the past. Do you want to repeat those mistakes? I do not! Look back at things that were not done, that needed to be done, and let's "right the ship". I say "we" not "me", for this our work. Let's take task in training men that will properly feed the flock.