

ELDERSHIP

A brief summary of
Biblical teaching

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1: The Context of Eldership

The subject of leadership in Christ's church is of vital importance. Good leaders are often the means by which God brings blessing to his people. On the other hand, bad leaders can wreck a church and the spiritual lives of individuals (Philippians 2:19, 20; Acts 20:29, 30).

In this first study, we set the scene for eldership by reminding ourselves of the basic purposes and task of the local church and its relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE MINISTRY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

To 'minister' simply means to serve, to carry out a task.

Aims of ministry

The church is God's people (1 Timothy 3:15) and the New Testament describes the church as having a definite threefold purpose.

1. Ministry to God – Worship

The church is God's worshipping assembly. We are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who belong to God that we might declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9; Romans 12:1; Philippians 3:3; Ephesians 2:21,22).

2. Ministry to one another – Nurture

We minister to one another in Christian encouragement and nurture. As a church, we are the body of Christ to serve and build one another up in the faith (Ephesians 4:15, 16; 1 Corinthians 12:7).

3. Ministry to the world – Witness

The church has the task of taking the gospel of salvation to lost men and women (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:16).

Avenues of ministry

How are these tasks to be accomplished? There are three basic avenues by which these goals are reached.

1. Ministry of the word

We are called to minister the truth of the gospel in faith and to faith (John 17:8, 17; Acts 2:42). We minister the word visually in baptism and the Lord's

supper. In the encouragement and discipline of the church, we help one another to obedience to the word.

2. Ministry of prayer

The Lord Jesus calls his church to be a praying community (Matthew 6:9 – 13). By the work of Christ, we have been granted access into the Most Holy Place. We can worship the Lord and pray for each other and the world (1 Timothy 2:1 – 4).

3. Ministry of mercy

The church is to care for people in a practical way. We are to care for the hungry, the stranger, the lonely, the sick and the needy. We are to look after orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27). We are to do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

Each of these three avenues of ministry serves each of the parts of the threefold purpose of the church.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18).

He is the Saviour of the church (Acts 20:28) and he is the Lord of the church (Colossians 1:18).

Christ is alive and sitting at the right hand of God in heaven and he rules over us and cares for us from there by his word and his Spirit, which are given into the world (2 Timothy 1:13, 14).

The Lord has chosen to exercise his care and his rule, in part, through men to whom he has delegated the task (Matthew 16:19).

Thus, in Scripture, Christ is described as the Chief Shepherd and church elders, by implication, as ‘under-shepherds’ (1 Peter 5:2 – 4). Or again, Christ is the master who is away at the present and church leaders are his servants to whom he has entrusted the management of his household (Matthew 24:45 – 51).

Elders are those through whom, in particular, Christ exercises his care and supervision of his church.

The aim of the elders’ work and care

We have seen that the task of the church is that of worship, nurture and witness

and the task of the elders is so to direct and care for the church and its individual members that the task is more and more perfectly fulfilled.

The elders are to bear in mind constantly the goal of building a church of mature, stable, obedient, joyful Christian people, who love the Lord from their hearts and worship him in Spirit and in truth, love the lost and are engaged in strident efforts to win them for Christ.

The character of the elders' work and care

The relationship of the elders to the rule of Christ implies three things about the way they seek to lead the church.

1. The principle of stewardship and servanthood

Elders are first of all servants of Christ to carry out his will. The Lord has made his will clear in his word, the Scriptures. Elders have no right to make up their own rules or simply to obey popular opinion in the church. Their task is to lovingly and gently, yet firmly, seek that Christ's word is obeyed by the church. They serve the church, but they serve the church by serving Christ (1 Timothy 5:21). They must give an account to him (Hebrews 13:17).

2. The principle of kingdom authority

This is the other side of the coin. When the elders are doing their job properly and seeking to lead the church and help individuals according to Christ's word, then realize that Christ's authority is behind them and is to be taken seriously (Hebrews 13:7).

3. The principle of organic growth

The church is composed of God's children growing to maturity; the church itself is a living body of Christ.

The supervision of the elders should, therefore, be such as not only to keep order, but also so as to encourage Christian growth in the character and service of the church. One of the best ways to accomplish this is by the elders truly being examples to the rest of the flock (1 Peter 5:3).

2: The Function of Eldership

Christ is the head of the church. We have seen that, although we are all gifted people and we are all his servants, he calls some men to special service of responsibility and care over the church (Matthew 24:45; 1 Thessalonians 5:12). We speak of them as having 'office' in the church.

OFFICE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

The only two offices in the local church, according to the New Testament, are those of elder and deacon (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1, 8).

The terms 'elder' and 'overseer' (bishop) are synonymous (cf Acts 20:17, 28).

Elders are responsible before God for all the affairs of the church; there is nothing in church life for which they can claim that it does not concern them (1 Timothy 3:5; 1 Timothy 5:17). They direct the affairs of the church.

The deacons are gifted people who are the general helpers of the eldership and to whom the elders can delegate such tasks as they see fit (cf Acts 6:1 – 7).

PICTURES OF THE ELDERS' TASKS

The Scripture terminology regarding eldership draws on a wide background, providing us with various insights into the function of elders in the church.

The ELDER in the community: a picture from local government

In the Old Testament, the elders were the older and senior men of the town or village who, by their age, wisdom and experience, were recognized by the rest of the community as leaders. They carried out the task of local government and justice. Very often, they were spokesmen for the people at a national level (Numbers 11:16, 17; 1 Samuel 8:4, 5; Proverbs 31:23).

The GUARD on the city wall: a picture from military service

The word translated 'overseer' or 'bishop' comes from a root which means to 'guard over' (1 Timothy 3:1).

The Greek version of the Old Testament used it in this way in 2 Kings 11:18 and, certainly, this is the way Paul is using the term in Acts 20:28, 31.

Elders are those with special responsibility to guard the church and the souls of individuals.

The FATHER of the family: a picture from the home

This obviously lies behind Paul's thinking as he writes 1 Timothy 3:4, 5. A good father loves, provides for, protects, leads, disciplines, comforts and brings stability to his family.

All that a good father is to his family, the elder should be to the church.

The SHEPHERD with the flock: a picture from the field

The word 'shepherd' and related words are often used with respect to leadership in God's church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; John 21:16).

In Psalm 23, we read that the shepherd feeds the flock, brings rest, health, guidance and rejoicing to the sheep and is their comforting companion in dark and difficult places. All that a good shepherd is to his flock, the elder should be to the church.

The PATTERN in the workshop: a picture from industry

The elder is to be an example for other Christians to follow (1 Peter 5:3). The word used here for 'example' is used in Romans 6:17 of a mould into which the clay is pressed in order to make the ornament.

All the qualifications for eldership set out by Paul in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are elsewhere commanded of all Christians. The elder must be someone who has, in some measure, achieved these things in his life so that others can follow his ways. He must seek to provide a living proof that Christianity really works in practice.

THE ELDERS' TASK IN PRACTICE

The five essential ingredients can be summarized as follows.

1. LOOKING

The elder must be one who sees and makes himself aware of what is going on in the church and aware of the current spiritual state of the people under his care.

- This is gained by
- (i) hospitality to others (1 Timothy 3:2)
 - (ii) visiting folk in their homes (Acts 20:20; James 5:14)
 - (iii) being an approachable person
 - (iv) keeping his ears open in the church

2. GUARDING

The elders must guard all the preaching and teaching ministries in the church, protecting the church from false teachers, refuting error and giving the church sound doctrine (Acts 20:29, 30; Titus 1:9 – 11).

The elders must guard and promote the peace and purity of the church.

- (i) They are to seek to admit to the membership of the church none but such as give credible evidence of having been born again (1 Corinthians 5:6 – 7).
- (ii) They are to administer discipline. Out of genuine love, they are to seek to restore the backslider (James 5:19, 20).
- (iii) They are to seek to settle disputes and to bring about reconciliation (Matthew 18:15 – 17).

3. LEADING

The elders are pastors whose job is also to stimulate the work and growth of the church and of individuals (Ephesians 4:11 – 13; 2 Timothy 2:2).

They are leaders who, under the Spirit of God and according to his word, should be open to God's leading to see new opportunities for the church to seize for Christ and the gospel (Acts 13:3).

All these things must be done in gentleness, according to the word of God and with respect for the personal conscience and liberty of individuals. The eldership is not to be oppressive but loving.

4. PRAYING

Elders must be men of prayer (Philippians 1:9 – 11). All the activities of the elders must be baptized in prayer. The elder should pray for each individual under his care regularly and intelligently.

5. TEACHING

This is most important and distinguishes the eldership more than anything else. After character the first proven ability of elders is the ability to teach, 1 Timothy 3.2. It is God's word that feeds the flock, Matthew 4.4. When teaching is according to God's word it is 'sound' and leads to the health of the church. Error is destructive of the church. Writing to Titus Paul insists that an elder must 'hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught,' Titus 1.9. We may seek to explain the message in ways suitable to our cultural context but we must not change the message. It must be the message which the apostles taught.

3: The Structure of Eldership

The local church has the threefold purpose of worship, nurture and witness through the ministry of God's word, prayer and works of mercy. Christ, as the head of the church, chooses to exercise his care and rule over the church, in part, through making use of men, elders, whom he calls to act as guards and shepherds over his flock (1 Peter 5:1, 2).

We are now looking to see what the New Testament has to say concerning how the eldership is to be organized or structured. Scripture leaves many details open in this matter to allow for flexibility according to local situations. However, it does lay down three very important rubrics.

PLURALITY OF ELDERSHIP

Wherever the New Testament speaks about elders in the church, it always speaks about there being more than one.

Well-established churches, like those at Ephesus, had a plural eldership (Acts 20:1; Philippians 1:1). This was not mere coincidence because, in the brand-new churches at Iconium, Lystra, Pisidian Antioch and on Crete, elders (plural) were appointed from the beginning (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

The care and leadership of the New Testament churches were never in the hands of one man. Here are some very practical reasons which are behind this way of doing things:

- One man can only cope with one pastoral problem at a time. What happens if many problems occur at once?
- One man cannot be on-call, constantly available. He has his family to care for too.
- Different folk within a church relate best to different personalities. It is wise to have a mixture of personalities in the eldership.
- One man on his own can become overloaded and depressed. He needs others with whom he can share the load and who will encourage him.
- One man alone can become headstrong and wilful in his leadership. Within a group, this tendency can be checked (3 John 9).
- If one man leads the church, it will give the impression that, in a way, he is the head of the church and so obscure the headship of Christ.

The eldership is a group of godly men, working together in the church for the good of the people and the glory of God.

PARITY WITHIN THE ELDERSHIP

The word parity simply means equality. There is equality between the elders. The New Testament knows nothing of one man, or some men, within the eldership being 'higher in rank' than the rest.

In particular, the 'pastor' is simply one among the other elders and is not above them in authority. This must be so since the only authority in the church is the word of God and all the elders are its servants (1 Timothy 3:2).

Thus, when Paul summons the elders from Ephesus and speaks with them, he makes no distinction between them (Acts 20:28). Similarly, Peter makes no distinction as he addresses elders in his first epistle (1 Peter 5:2).

The 'double honour' for elders who rule well, of which Paul speaks in 1 Timothy 5:17, is the honour of being supported financially fulltime by the church (as the next verse, v18, makes clear). This gives a man extra time for work in the church but does not raise him in 'rank' above other elders.

PARTICULARITY WITHIN THE ELDERSHIP

1 Timothy 5:17 also shows us that, although all the elders are responsible to care for the church, some have, from God, the particular work of the public teaching and preaching of God's word.

Just as with the apostles in Acts 6, these men need to be given the time and freedom to 'give attention to prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4). While the text recognises no elders whose calling is simply to preach and do nothing else, yet it is saying that these men must be allowed to make preaching and teaching their particular priority.

That all the elders are to be 'able to teach' (1 Timothy 3:2) does not mean that all elders must be gifted as preachers. But they are to be able to teach and encourage people on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, as they are in people's homes, at the hospital bedside or wherever.

4. The Requirements for Eldership (1)

Paul's missionary strategy had two phases. There was the initial evangelism in a vicinity. Then, later, they would revisit the new-born churches and transfer responsibility for the work to appointed elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

THE APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS

There are two essential aspects to the appointment of elders.

1. First and foremost, they are men appointed by God (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:8, 11). The Holy Spirit appoints men to the office of elder by calling them inwardly, by giving them the spiritual gifts of caring and teaching required for the work, and by developing in them a godly character.
2. Secondly, those whom God has called must be recognised by the church. The church is a voluntary society. A man cannot lead the church unless the church is willing to be led by him. The church must be able to recognise the stamp of God's call upon the man. Thus, Paul sets out in a practical way the things that will mark out such a man called by God, in order that the church may recognise him. Paul does this in 1 Timothy 3:1 – 7 and Titus 1:5 – 9.

THE NOBLE TASK OF ELDERSHIP

Paul commends the work of eldership, caring for God's people, as a noble task (1 Timothy 3:1). He calls it this because:

- (i) It is a work very close to God's own heart (Acts 20:28).
- (ii) It is to follow in the footsteps of Christ, the great Shepherd (John 10:11, 14).
- (iii) It is a work which will be greatly rewarded by the Lord if carried out diligently (1 Peter 5:4).

In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul is not commending sinful desire for office and position in the church. The early church was persecuted. To become an elder was to be a marked man. Willingness to serve as an elder meant willingness to sacrifice. It is this attitude which Paul is commending.

THE UMBRELLA QUALIFICATION: ABOVE REPROACH

Paul begins his list of requirements with a term which is meant to be a headline and cover everything else he will say. An elder must be 'above reproach',

'blameless' (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6).

- He must be a man of good moral and spiritual reputation in the eyes of the church.
- He must deserve that good reputation. It must not be the result of acting a part.
- The church as a whole must be able to express their confidence in him. In practical terms, this is usually done through a vote of confidence at a church meeting.

FIVE POSITIVE QUALITIES REQUIRED

Paul now goes into a little detail. He first gives a list of five positive qualities of character. There is some overlapping between them (1 Timothy 5:2).

The husband of but one wife

This cannot mean that an elder must be married (Paul himself was not, see 1 Corinthians 7:8, 32). Rather, it is assumed that he is married, as was generally the case.

Marital fidelity must mark the elder. No immoral man can hold office. The elder has to be an example to others (Matthew 5:27 – 30; Galatians 5:19).

Temperate

This relates to a man's style of life. It means a man who is careful and earnest. But it does not mean sombre or grim. A man who is steady and sane. (It is only joy in the Lord which provides the proper basis for true sanity (Nehemiah 8:10; Philippians 4:4)).

An elder's work is only suited to the man whose pleasures are primarily those of the soul rather than the senses.

Self-controlled

He is not to be a rash man. He is not to be quick-tempered (Titus 1:7; Proverbs 15:18).

Self-control and discipline are often needed in order to be able to rise to the needs of the church when we are tired.

He is to be a man who does not run his life according to his feelings, which are transient, but according to the eternal principles of the word of God.

Respectable

He must be an upright man (Titus 1:8), a man of integrity who people can trust.

The root meaning of the word is 'orderly'. He must not be a scatterbrain. It is only orderly people who can maintain a real prayer life, which is so necessary to the elder's work.

Hospitable

He must not be a man who is frightened of social contact. His house must be known to be one with an open door (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9).

Behind the open door there must be a heart that is open, especially to the lonely, the rejected, the stranger, the needy.

THE FIRST PROVEN ABILITY: ABLE TO TEACH

Much of the elder's work of guarding, nurturing and encouraging involves teaching God's word (Titus 1:9). We feed on God's word (Hebrews 5:11 – 14). The elder need not have a gift for public ministry, but must be able to teach in smaller pastoral situations. This ability to teach includes three things:

1. A basic grasp of and submission to the content and doctrine of Scripture (Titus 1:9).
2. A proven ability to communicate the content of Scripture to others (Nehemiah 8:8).
3. Such a love for Jesus and such a love for people as to motivate him to want to share the word (John 21:15).

5. The Requirements for Eldership (2)

When God calls someone into the work of eldership he equips them for the task. He builds into them the qualities of character needed for leadership and gives to them spiritual gifts and abilities which will enable them to do the job (2 Timothy 1:6).

These God-given qualities and abilities are practical things which we can recognise and so know who God is appointing among us. Paul sets out what these qualities and gifts are in 1 Timothy 3:1 – 7 and Titus 1:5 – 9.

We are following the passage in 1 Timothy (and referring to Titus as necessary) and so far, we have seen that, under the general heading of being ‘above reproach’, an elder must be characterised as maritally faithful, sane and sensible, self-controlled, commanding respect and hospitable. Furthermore, he must have the ability to teach God’s word in pastoral situations (1 Timothy 3:2).

FIVE NEGATIVE QUALITIES REQUIRED

Paul next lists five qualities of character framed in a (mostly!) negative way. All Christians ought to possess these, but an elder must do (1 Timothy 3:2).

Not given to much wine (cf Titus 1:7)

The drinking of wine is not a sin (Psalm 104:15; John 2:1 – 11). Wine was common in the ancient world.

But, wherever there is alcohol, there is the danger of excess, and drunkenness is a sin and is forbidden to Christians (Ephesians 5:18). It is within an elder’s liberty to drink wine, but if he does, he must have his appetite for it well under control. God cannot use a drunkard as an elder (1 Peter 5:3).

The principle holds for any legitimate appetite. He must be a man who controls it, rather than it controlling him.

Not violent

An elder is not to be one given to either physical or verbal violence. If he is quick-tempered, people will be afraid to go to him with their problems (Ephesians 4:31; Titus 1:7).

Not violent, but gentle

This gentleness, in contrast to violence, has two aspects:

1. The aspect of patience. Love is not easily provoked (1 Corinthians 13:5; Colossians 1:11).

2. The aspect of tenderness and kindness. The Lord Jesus Christ is our great example of kindness to sinners (Isaiah 42:3; John 8:11).

Not quarrelsome

There are some people with a hyper-critical spirit, always ready to see the worst in others, to pick faults and to pick a fight (Galatians 5:15). Such a man would ruin the peace and unity of a church (Ephesians 4:3).

Not a lover of money

Jesus made it plain that anyone who loves money cannot be a servant of God (Matthew 6:24).

To love money is to love this world and so not to know the love of the Father (1 John 2:15).

An elder who loves money can be bribed and bought off from speaking the word of God as he ought (Numbers 22:16).

THE SECOND PROVEN ABILITY: MANAGING HIS FAMILY WELL

The requirement (1 Timothy 3:4)

With respect to his own wife and children, it must be seen that, according to God's order, the man is the head of his household, with his wife submitting to him and his children obeying him (Ephesians 5:22 – 24).

However, a government of mere tyranny will not do! He must lead with such firmness and consideration and love that they submit to him because they love and respect him.

A man whose children are rebellious prodigals may be a very 'nice' chap, but he is not the man for eldership.

The reason for this requirement (1 Timothy 3:5)

To care for and lead a church requires the same kind of ability as caring for and leading a family. Paul is arguing from the lesser situation to the more difficult situation.

If a man lacks the knowledge, patience, love and moral backbone to nurture his family well, he doesn't have what it takes to nurture the church.

If, on the other hand, the man's family is shaping up well under his care, there is every reason to think he has what it takes to nurture God's family.

How do we recognise the men God is calling to eldership? All ten qualities of character must be really present (to a greater or lesser extent), and both abilities to teach and to manage must be present in the man.

TWO SAFEGUARDS AGAINST THE DEVIL'S SCHEMES (1 Timothy 3:6, 7)

Paul is ever aware that the Christian church is in the midst of a spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10 – 20), and that Christians, though they be saved sinners, are still sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

He closes, therefore, by laying down two rules to help thwart some common schemes of the devil.

- It is an honour to be an elder (1 Timothy 3:1). Don't give that honour to someone who has only been a Christian a short time. If you do, they are likely to swell with pride and so be of no use to the Lord or the church (Proverbs 16:18; Luke 18:11). So, 1 Timothy 3:6.
A good man will not spoil for being given a little time to mature before taking up the work.
- There is every possibility of a man being one thing at church and quite another thing at work. The devil loves to deceive.
Thus, Paul encourages the church to a little investigation among a man's neighbours and workmates who are outside the church. Of a good man, they may tell you that they don't like his 'religion', but they will admit his integrity (1 Timothy 3:7).

6. The Church's Attitude to its Eldership

The effectiveness of the help which someone offers us is often dependent upon our attitude to that person.

The New Testament tells us that the attitude of the church towards its elders is of great importance. It is no good just having a body of men called 'the elders', even if they are rightly qualified. Unless the church has a good attitude towards them, it will be of no advantage (Hebrews 13:17).

There are terrible extremes in this matter. Some churches and groups want to raise their leaders almost to the position of gods; others treat their leaders with little more than disguised contempt (1 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Corinthians 16:10).

THE FOUNDATION: LOVING RESPECT

The Scriptures encourage us to hold in honour all Christian workers who labour for Christ's kingdom (Matthew 10:40; Galatians 4:14; Philippians 2:29). The Lord himself is with us all, but these men are particular instruments, chosen for his purposes.

Thus, Paul writes concerning elders, leaders in the local church, 'Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work' (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13).

The word 'respect' here means to 'recognise the true worth of' (cf John 1:33). The world generally despises and dismisses church leaders, but the church is to recognise them as God's special instruments.

Thus, the church is to hold its elders in 'the highest regard'. Generally speaking, Christians will love and treasure a godly elder who they know loves and treasures them.

This loving respect must be something which the elders have earned as men, not something which is simply attached to the office (1 Timothy 5:16, 20).

Elders are to be people who are naturally in the affection and esteem of the church because of the good and godly men that they are (Philippians 2:20 – 22).

It is right to love and respect the elders because they love you and, under the Lord Jesus Christ, are seeking nothing but your good and to bring you safe to heaven (1 Timothy 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:10 – 12).

RESPECTING AND LOVING THE ELDERS IN PRACTICE

The outworking of the attitude of loving respect includes at least three essential ingredients.

1. Intelligent submission to the eldership (Hebrews 13:17)

- This does not mean unquestioning obedience to the eldership whatever they say. Such a situation can never lead people to maturity (Ephesians 4:13) and ends in people putting their faith in the church rather than in Christ.
- But it does mean that, as the eldership teaches the Scripture (Hebrews 13:7), and intellectual doubts and personal questions are dealt with, it must be put into practice (James 1:22).
- This is not to say that sometimes the eldership might not have to take action quickly without explaining what they are doing from the Scriptures. When we see a blind man about to walk over a cliff, we have to act first and make explanations later. However, an eldership which functions continuously without Scriptural explanations is bad eldership.
- Christians are best able to take teaching and, especially, correction from people they love and respect and who they know love and respect them (Proverbs 27:6; Ephesians 4:15).
- The motives for such submission to the elders are because they will have to give an account to the Lord, and because such submission will enable them to do their job better and that will be better for all of us and glorify the Lord (Hebrews 13:17).

2. Honest appraisal of the eldership (1 Timothy 5:19, 20)

- The church must love the elders of the church but not so as to be blind if grave problems arise.
- The elders are ultimately accountable to the church meeting. If there is a serious doctrinal or moral lapse in an elder, it must be dealt with properly and fairly. This may mean rebuke or removal from office, Matthew 18:15-17.
- It is important that there be a thorough investigation of accusations. Good elders can sometimes ruffle people's feathers for right reasons and people react badly and unfairly by making unfounded accusations against them. Elders are called first to be faithful to the Lord before being popular in the church.

3. Loving encouragement of the elders (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

- The context of 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13 is encouragement. Paul is indicating that very often the elders need encouragement in their work. It is not always easy to 'warn the idle, encourage the timid, help the weak and be patient with everyone' (v14).
- Eldership can be very stressful. Church members see some of the problems in a church; the elders ought to know about them all and often they do (2 Corinthians 11:28).
- Some causes of 'ministerial depression' are: no relaxation, loneliness, pressures in the home, demands of preaching, the 'super-successful' ministry of others.
- Elders, like all of us, require encouragement now and then – by a timely and cheerful word, a smile instead of a scowl and, most of all, by commitment to the Lord's church and obedience to His word among the people (Proverbs 12:25).

4. Fervent prayer for the elders (Acts 14:23; 20:36)

- Pray that they might be protected from the assaults of Satan. Church leaders are often his special targets. Pray that they may be kept from sin.
- Pray that they be kept from becoming mere figureheads, more concerned with their position than with serving the Lord. Think of the elders of Israel who, out of jealousy, crucified the Lord Jesus (Matthew 26:3, 4).
- Pray that they might have the strength and wisdom for doing their work of guarding and helping the flock well. Pray that they may be continually filled with God's Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).
- Pray that they might have the words and courage and insight to minister the word of God as they should (Ephesians 6:19, 20).

Happy is the church where the people love the elders and the elders love the people and they all love the Lord! Watch such a church – good things are bound to happen.

