



Front Cover

SHEPHERDING OF SHEEP

Preface

In the beginning of time, God created the human race and broke it down into manageable units called families. Fathers and mothers within the framework of each family were given specific assignments that would preserve the species (Ephesians 6:1-4). Four thousand years later, God brought into existence another family, spiritual in nature, called the church. In this family, He assigned certain men the responsibility of providing leadership that would guarantee the continuity of this spiritual species (Ephesians 3:14-15). These men were called elders, bishops, overseers, etc (Acts 14:23, Hebrews 13:17, I Peter 5:1-4). They are stewards of God (Titus 1:7). They manage His affairs.

The ability to provide dynamic leadership for a congregation is not a quality possessed by every man. God, who gives each person gifts with which to minister (I Peter 4:10), gives some men the gift of leadership (Romans 12:8), and they are told to rule, or lead, with diligence. Elders are examples to the flock (I Peter 5:3). They are actually model Christians whose lives serve as a pattern for the flock to follow.

Harold Russwurm, the author of this book, has served as an elder for the Lord's Church for many years. It has been my pleasure to have served with him in the same congregation. What he has written in this treatise has been taken not only from scripture, but also from his own life experiences. While reading what he has written about Shepherding the Sheep, I could not always tell when he was quoting from the Word of God, or merely citing from some event with which he and I wrestled. It has been encouraging to me to read what he has written, but far more consoling to know that he has been one of the shepherds who has watched for my soul (Hebrews 13:17).

Cline Paden

SHEPHERDING OF SHEEP

God Looks at the Heart

Leadership is, and always has been, very important to God. He has chosen men throughout time to serve as leaders of His people. Some leaders have been such that they led the people to obey and serve God. Others have caused, or allowed by their leadership or lack of it, disobedience by following after other gods. Some of those chosen would, at times during their early rule, try to get the people to follow the

right ways, but, once the people showed resistance, the leader would lose patience and thereby allow the people to do as they pleased.

Aaron demonstrated this type of leadership when Moses was on the mountain receiving the law of God (Exodus 32). In circumstances such as these, many times it is not easy to stand for what is right in God's sight, but the leader for God should always select God's way over that of those he is attempting to lead.

Some other leaders were very persistent in teaching and following after God even though the people would reject God's ways. One example of this would be Noah and his continuing to preach even though none would follow after God (Genesis chapters 6 and 7). Some of the leaders, because of their own wickedness, would lead the people away from God, either to worship and serve other Gods, or to worship and serve the leader himself. Being a leader is never easy because of the great responsibility one assumes when he attempts to lead others. All men do not desire to be leaders. Some that desire to do so, do not possess the ability to lead others.

Even all of those possessing leadership abilities are not equal in the abilities they have to lead others. However, we must recognize that God can take a person and use him as His own man. God, by His blessings, can develop one into a great leader. One must be willing to be used by God in the way He sees fit in order for him to be developed into an effective leader. God is able to see leadership ability in a person when men cannot. Look at the call of Moses by God, and the many excuses used by the called one to try to convince God that He was choosing an inferior person to be a leader (Exodus 3 and 4).

2

However, after a study of the life of Moses, we find him being developed into a great leader for God's people of his day. The people were complaining constantly about the treatment they were receiving, but Moses would take the action that God had directed him to take. When they were captives, God used Moses to lead them out of captivity (Exodus 14). At times of hunger, God provided them with food (Exodus 16). God also provided them with water when they were thirsty (Exodus 17). Moses, as a leader, listened to much murmuring from those he was chosen by God to lead.

In I Samuel 16:1–7, we are given some insight into how God looks for a leader. God tells Samuel that He has rejected Saul as king over Israel. Then, God tells Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (verse 7). From this, we can readily see that God selects men for the type of heart they have and for their character rather than for their appearance or size. God, today, still looks upon the heart of the man rather than his appearance or popularity. God completely knows the heart of a man even better than man knows his own heart.

Why Do Men Desire to Be a Leader?

Various individual men seek to be leaders for different reasons. Some may seek to be in a position of leadership in order to receive honor; others want to be in the spotlight; some are looking for authority; while some want to be famous. Others have different motives, such as gaining wealth for personal use, getting even with someone, or proving to themselves or someone else that they can attain a certain position.

It is not possible to list all of the motives that cause men to seek to become leaders since we cannot know the heart of man as God does. Of course, all of the above motives are self-seeking and are not what God would look for in one He would chose as a leader of His people. The selfish desires of man will never be used by God to choose someone to be a leader of His people. Since God is seeking men to lead His people from sin to salvation and from earth to heaven, He is looking for those men who will have the interest of those he is leading in his heart.

3

When someone is asked to serve as a leader in the local church, he needs to give careful and prayerful consideration to this. Usually, if you are suggested by some or recommended by them, it means that, in their judgment, you are a leader. When one accepts such a position of leadership, he must be willing to do his best with God's help to fulfill the work expected of him as outlined in the Scripture. God looks on the heart and, therefore, wants men who will serve others and obey Him in all that he does.

Who Is A Leader?

Let us try to define a leader. He is someone with the ability to lead; someone who can give guidance and direction to others. He is one who is going somewhere and has the qualities to enroll others to follow him. Sometimes, a man may perceive himself to be a leader when others do not. Therefore, for one to be an effective leader, he must be recognized by those he is to lead as someone with the qualities to cause them to want to follow him. One cannot lead unless others are willing to follow.

In order for one to lead for God, he must know the way and have the ability to move others into and along this way. A good leader for God's people will always have a deep love for people. He will have concern for the souls of men, women, and children. He will be constantly on guard as he watches on behalf of their souls.

There is no substitute for the love that a leader must have for those he is attempting to lead. A leader must, at all times, lead in such a way as to care properly for those in his charge.

From the Beginning Man Was to Lead

In the beginning, God created man to serve in the leadership role. He asked Adam to name the animals which He had created (Genesis 2:19-20). Even after man had

disobeyed God and sinned by eating of the forbidden fruit in the garden, God continued to have contact with him and gave man laws to govern him (Genesis 3).

These laws were given by God to man for man's own good. God's laws and ways have always been given for the good of man, and this remains true even to this day. The community, state, or nation

4

in which we live will be a better place if the residents will abide by the laws and desires of God. Just because man chooses not to obey God does not make the law bad. We must always remember that God's ways are much higher than man's ways and, in the end, they will prevail.

A Leader Begins By Leading His Family

Noah was chosen by God to be a spokesman for Him and a leader for God in the age in which he lived. Even though Noah was not able to enlist many followers because of the wickedness of man during his lifetime, he still proved to be a messenger for God. Because of their wickedness and disobedience, God decided to destroy man from the face of the earth (Genesis 6 and 7). This He did by sending a flood which destroyed all mankind except for Noah, his wife, their three sons, and their wives; eight souls in all.

Because Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, God did not totally destroy man, but allowed Noah and his family to be saved in the ark (Genesis 6:8). We might ask the question, "Was Noah successful?" It would appear that he was since he was able to keep man from being totally destroyed from the earth. Look at all of the people on the earth today, and we see that, because of Noah, we all exist. Because of Noah's type of leadership, he was able to save his family.

There appears to be a great lesson for us in this today. God had seen in Noah the characteristics needed to save some and used him for this purpose.

As you and I reflect upon this event which happened many, many years ago, we can benefit from it in our lives today. It tells us that God has always required a leader to be able to lead his own family. Therefore, does it not stand to reason that one of the qualifications for an elder in the church today must be "one who rules his own house well" (I Timothy 3:4)?

In His wisdom, God has always known that unless a man can be a leader in his own house, he cannot be an effective and acceptable leader in the church. Let us look at some of the reasons why this needs to be demonstrated before one becomes an elder in the church.

5

First of all, the more we are together, the better we should be able to communicate by example, and the better we should be able to give instructions. By setting the proper example in our lives and teachings, we should exert more influence on those whom we are rearing and training in our home. Our daily lives should allow us to demonstrate continually the principles by which we live. Therefore, the father and husband should have the most influence on his own wife and children since they spend so much time together in the home.

It has been properly said that in order to get to really know someone it is necessary to observe him under all circumstances and conditions. That is, in good times, bad times, times of want and times of plenty, as well as times of joy, times of sorrow, times of laughter, and times of solitude. The love that exist, or should exist, within a family will cause us to be willing to work on resolving matters that inevitably arise within a family.

Many times there will not be even partial agreement and, at times, there will be total disagreement; however, because of our love and care for the person involved, we will go to great lengths and make many personal sacrifices to resolve the problem. This is possible because we have been willing to listen to the problem and use all means available, including hours in prayer to God for guidance, to bring the matter to a conclusion.

If the leader in the home has demonstrated in his previous lifestyle that he is fair in his dealings and evaluations, this will be most helpful. These same attitudes will work in resolving problems in the lives of the members of the church and in resolving problems that arise in the church itself. When individuals have seen by their lives that these men are interested in serving and in helping each individual to reach a solution to a situation in which they find themselves involved, they will come to the leaders. If people are not bringing their problems to a particular person before that person is appointed an elder, individuals will not come to him after he begins serving as an elder.

Once a level of trust and confidence has been developed, individuals are willing to seek out an elder for advice and counsel. By having observed them in times past, they will be able to determine if, as an elder, they act and react out of the fulfillment of their own desires, or will truly seek what is best for the individual. They

6

will have already determined, in their judgment, if the elder's wisdom is from God or from man.

Leaders Should Seek Wisdom From Above

In James 1:5, we are told that if we lack wisdom, we are to ask God who gives freely to all who ask and expect to receive. Because of this teaching from an inspired individual, we should pray often for the guidance and help we need from on high. The longer we serve others, the more we will be made aware of our need for the blessings from our Father.

Our best service is rendered when we are totally in tune with God's way. The course of action we take in our lives, as well as the advice we give others, must be based on the principles of God found in His Word.

When we dedicate our hearts to prayer on behalf of others and develop a knowledge of God's word, we will be able to give sound counsel that will be of great benefit to those seeking help and to those we know that we can help. Even with their blessings, we will not always be able to lead all we seek to help to be God-fearing and cause them to turn and serve and obey Him. However, without using the principles of God, we will be instant failures and not only cause others to be lost, but, also, we will lose our own souls in the process. There is no substitute for wisdom from above and knowledge of God and how He has dealt with man throughout the ages.

In order for someone to be a good leader, he must be as much like God as possible. We can only learn about God from the Bible, and from those who have made a study of Him through His Word. This does not mean that we have to be perfect, sinless, or above being led into error. It means that we are growing in the attributes of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We cannot grow more like God without knowing about Him. The life of Christ gives us excellent insights into what God is like.

We can use the Old Testament today to see how God has dealt with man in the past. Since the leader is interested in leading and guiding others to the Lord, a careful study of the Old Testament can prove most beneficial. The leader can get a good understanding of how

7

God dealt with man in the past, and we can see how man reacted to God and His leaders during this period.

Many times the leader will be the medium whereby others are encouraged to follow the ways of the New Testament. The leader becomes a better servant of the Lord by serving others. How rewarding it is to have others seek your guidance and counsel in their lives as they attempt to put Satan behind them and serve the Lord.

When Council Is Required

Many times individuals will come to you and seek advice on many matters and ask for your assistance in dealing with problems which arise in their lives. These problems will range from difficulties at work, to family relationships, problems with sin, problems with their brothers and sisters in the church, problems with what God expects of them in their roles of father, mother, etc. In order for us to be of help in solving these problems, we must be good listeners and then be willing to seriously seek to give helpful advice based on the will of God.

Most of the time the person already knows what needs to be done but just wants some reassurance. Other times, it may be that you will have to spend some time in correcting a course of action that they may be considering. Just remember that they

came to you, and you need to give sound advice based on your understanding of God's will for them.

Each person and each situation will require your interest and attention which should always be tempered with love, care, and concern for the soul of the person involved. We should never get to the point where we consider the matter they are bringing to us as unimportant.

If they were concerned enough to come to you, you must be concerned and interested enough to listen and direct them in the proper course. We should never allow ourselves to get to the point that we feel we have all the answers. When we do, something completely new will come up. God has the answers and we must constantly look to Him for guidance through prayer and a search of His word. Answers do not always come easily or instantaneously. We, too, can grow by the experiences of others, and God uses such circumstances to help further mature us.

8

Resolving Problems Often Takes Time and Understanding

There is no magic to problem solving for yourself or others. Quick solutions come very rarely. Solutions come through prayer and meditation on the teachings of the Bible. Our previous experiences and those of older Christians can be a great help in finding biblical solutions to problems.

Our ability to deal with problems will be enhanced by increasing our knowledge and understanding of the scriptures. We must never forget that true wisdom comes from above and is available to us through prayer. No greater examples can be found than seeing how God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit dealt with the problems of man throughout the ages. Man has a long history of rebellion and disobedience, and God has many ways to try and get man to see His way clearly. We, as leaders, must use all available scriptural means to resolve the problems that are hindering others from serving the Lord. There are very few one-line problem solutions. Since problems in life and problems with sin take time to develop, it will usually take some time to resolve them and change our lives to God's way. We must be willing to commit our ability and our resources to help resolve the difficulty.

Many times solving a problem will require time, loss of sleep, frustration, and sometimes even money. The solution may turn out to appear to us as a complete failure. However, we must remember that when we are trying to help others, many times that which appears to be a failure may not be one at all. Most of the time we want instant resolutions and so do those we are seeking to help. It may, however, take time for the results that God wants, to develop. Usually, the most lasting results are not immediately seen.

Serving as a leader in the church is good since one becomes more like God by serving others. We should never allow ourselves to become discouraged as a leader of God's people before going to His word and reading about some of His leaders in

days gone by. Some of these will readily come to mind such as Moses, Noah, David, and others.

Many of these did not receive instant, positive results, and some did not achieve results for a very long period of time. Many times they were verbally abused by the people that they were attempting to

9

lead. Such will be the case, even today. In view of this, we must be on guard and not allow anything to give us a reason to cease to do what is right.

Seek To Do Your Best

As men, we must approach leadership in the Lord's church with the attitude that we will do the best that we are capable of doing while seeking God's guidance. We must fully use the abilities which He has given us to develop into what He wants us to be. With this type of outlook, and blessings from above, we will be well on the road to becoming a leader for God.

Church Is Not a Business

To many times we, as elders, become so engulfed in the process of decision making that we overlook our real mission; the leading of others from sin to God. We need to keep man walking toward God and to see that man's needs are met. It is very doubtful that any of us will be long remembered for the wise decisions or long and wordy statements made by us as we attempt to serve. Many, however, will be fondly and lovingly remembered by others when the leader has fulfilled a need. It may be as simple as being available when needed such as when one is in the hospital, or when there is a death in the family, or in speaking a kind word of encouragement to someone. It could be for taking the time to help or even discouraging someone from doing something that he might later regret.

Serving as a leader is very demanding and one must be willing to pay the price in order to receive the reward laid up for faithful leaders. We must be careful to spend most of our time in shepherding the flock and not on the business affairs of the church. We must shepherd the entire flock; not just those who are easy to lead.

Sheep Have Various Needs

All sheep do not need the same thing at the same time. Some are healthy and need to be exercised; others are sick and need special care. Some are seeking their own way and need correction; others are indifferent and need teaching and encouragement. Some are easy to lead while others are difficult and need more time and

training than others in order to reach a more mature position in the Lord. All need to be loved, listened to, encouraged, and served in various ways. Some will need correction, rebuking, or exhorting; yet each is a sheep and is in need of a shepherd to furnish them guidance and direction.

Christ the Good Shepherd Our Example

We must always look to Christ as the Chief Shepherd and to the elders as "under shepherds." In John 10:1-6, we are to have some of the leadership qualities of a shepherd. We are told that the shepherd enters by the door. He has not entered by some other way. This must mean that the shepherd has been with the sheep before and, by their knowledge of him, they have learned to trust him. He has earned their respect by having spent time with the sheep and they are willing to follow him. He is not new or unknown to those in the fold. In fact, he has spent so much time with the sheep in times past that they recognize his voice. From his speaking to them, they receive reassurance that one who cares for them has arrived and is ready to lead them.

They see the shepherd as one who is ready, willing, and able to lead them. Therefore, they will willingly follow his leadership. When he enters the sheepfold, they do not always run and hide in one corner, but rather approach him on hearing his voice and, by drawing near, they show their willingness to follow him to be fed and watered. No indications are given that he gained their respect and confidence by making great decisions or handing down important statements. He has gained their respect by showing care, concern, and love for them by the service he has previously rendered.

We are told that he knows them by name. This indicates that he has spent time with each individual sheep. From this, we should learn that it takes time on the part of the sheep and the shepherd to develop a relationship which allows them to know one another. Such a relationship is necessary for an effective and fruitful association between the sheep and the shepherd. By spending some time together and getting to know each other, a relationship develops which will allow mutual confidence and trust that can be employed throughout life.

We should also learn that it is essential for the sheep to know the shepherd as well as the shepherd to know the sheep. Many of us, at one time or another in our lives, have met someone whom we would just as soon not be around. However, many times on getting to know the person better, we have changed our view of the person and have actually gotten very close to him. Since we desire to serve the sheep, the better we know them, the more readily we can meet their needs. Christians are at different stages of development in their spiritual maturity and we, as shepherds, need to be aware of this in order to render the best possible service to them. Some will need to be fed the meat of the Word while others will need only milk. We must be aware of this in order to see that each gets the proper diet.

The type of relationship and understanding that we are trying to develop comes only when the sheep and the shepherd have been allowed to grow together for some time. Did you notice that, by readily following his voice, the sheep are submissive to the shepherd? This indicates that when the sheep know that the shepherd is looking out for their best interest, there is total willingness on their part to immediately follow him.

In the company where I worked, at one time I reported to a man who always more than adequately looked out for my best interest in meetings in which my work was being evaluated. There was never an occasion during the time that I reported to him that he would not stand up and speak on my behalf or defend me if I needed to be defended. Consequently, I was totally comfortable knowing my best interest was being properly protected when he was present.

This is the way it should be between the shepherd and the sheep. When sheep have this feeling about their shepherds, they can go about their activities with full assurance that the shepherd is properly representing their interests. The sheep will not have to concern themselves about whether things are being done properly and scripturally. They will know the shepherd and have confidence in his judgment in matters of the church and their lives.

A great need exists today, as always, for proper respect for those in the leadership of the church. Those who serve in the leadership of the church must realize that respect is earned and not gained by an office, position, or the quotation of a verse of scripture such as, "obey them that have the rule over you, and

12

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 profitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17). This verse is quoted many times by those serving in the eldership and they look upon it as an authoritative position. Individuals will gladly submit when the leader shows himself to be deserving of submission by the manner of daily life he lives in their presence. Submission will only be given when the sheep have proper respect and willingly accept the shepherd.

Since the sheep need to be able to approach the shepherd, the shepherd must be readily available to them. In times past, did the people around you come to you for help and advice? If they did not come before you became an elder, it is pretty apparent that they will not come after you are appointed. Many times the reverse is found to be true and this is a shame and very sad. The individual Christian will oftentimes see you in a different light once you become an elder.

Previous generations viewed the eldership as an authoritative body and many today see it in the same way. It could be that, once someone has begun to serve as an elder, the individual Christian has the feeling that the elder has more important things to do than deal with their problems. Conversely, the individual Christian may be wary of the action the elder will take should the elder come to him. The elder needs to be aware of the reluctance of the individual Christian to come to him that

develops at times and use the example of his life to gain the respect and confidence of the Christian.

The sheep must know that they will be listened to and that you will give due consideration concerning the matter which they have brought to you. This does not mean that you will always agree with them. You will find out that many times you cannot support them in what they desire to do. You should listen and seek what is best for them as children of God.

Business Culture is Not the Yardstick

Many times our business culture has as much influence on the shaping of the principles and conduct of the leadership in the church as the Biblical principles.

13

Have you ever visited an elder's conference room? Most of these rooms are patterned after the board of director's conference rooms found in companies and corporations. Many of the elder's meetings are conducted in the same manner as company business meetings with printed agendas which set a time limit for discussion on the items listed. Our meetings must be conducted in an orderly manner and must be organized in order to be efficient and fair to all. However, we need to be very careful that we do not become a "board of directors" to the people we have been selected to serve. We are shepherds to them. Much time in the elder's meetings should be spent in prayer with, and for, those in the care of the elders, as well as for the elders themselves. This must be done so that our service will be acceptable to God.

Some Practical Suggestions

Some eldership's set aside a part of each meeting to pray with individuals or groups that they invite to come and meet with them. This is a good practice and should become the practice of all elders. What better way is there than this to set the proper example and keep abreast of the happenings within the congregation and the individual lives of each Christian? During the meeting, the individual or group may wish to express themselves and this is always a good way to get feedback.

This is also a good time to ask for suggestions regarding the growth and future of the congregation. When a very open and loving relationship exists within a congregation's shepherds and the sheep, Satan will have great difficulty in his efforts to divide the congregation so he can conquer it. At times, a family that has a need has been asked to attend an elder's meeting. Often, as a result of the prayers and encouragements which take place in such meetings, a lifelong, positive effect is made on the lives of those attending. This greatly helps to increase the bond of love that should always exist between Christians.

Some elderships establish a time for any member or group to meet with them to discuss anything they would like with the elders. There are many ways this can be

done. One of the very best ways is for one or two of the elders and their wives to go into the member's home and

14

spend some time with them. In most cases, a call should first be made to let them know that you are coming to have a friendly visit with them. This will prove to be one of the most rewarding and enjoyable experiences that you, as an elder, will have. It is an opportunity to be in a relaxed atmosphere with the member and his family. Bonds will be developed that will last a lifetime and understandings will be reached that will cause love to grow.

At times it might be well to make a short visit to the person at their work place. Make sure that this does not violate a policy of the company where the Christian is employed. This will show the person the interest you have in his welfare and, in some cases, have a positive effect on the employer.

Having various individuals, families, or groups into your home is also an excellent way to keep love growing. Going on a trip with some of the members can help you better understand them. There are many ways, other than the ones listed here, to show your personal interest in the welfare of the sheep and some will work better for one elder than another. It is important to stay in contact with the entire congregation in order to serve them properly. Choose the way that best suits you and those over which you are to care. Keep it going throughout your life and you will be greatly blessed in this life and more in the life to come.

Since no two elders will serve exactly the same people in the same way, the most important thing to do is to develop a way that you can continue to meet the needs of those in your fold. At times it will be necessary to protect the sheep when they become fearful. As shepherds, we must be ready to take whatever action we can to see that the sheep are adequately protected. At times, Christians are falsely accused, lied about, or misused by some, and the shepherd must come to their aid. Since we need to be involved in all phases of the life of the sheep, this, too, is one area that of which we need to be aware and offer our help when the need arises.

The Shepherd Enters Through the Door; Others Do Not

In John 10:1, we read, "...He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." A thief is one who will use the sheep in the wrong way.

15

He will take from them that which they have and use it for himself. He does not have respect for them and goes behind their backs to do harm by taking from them. He makes life more difficult by taking away that which they have accumulated to use in their daily living.

No wonder they will not follow a thief, since he is interested in his own welfare and not in their well being.

A robber is one who not only takes from them, but also does so with force and in their presence. He, too, is selfish and is looking to better himself at the expense of others. He will even risk punishment to get what he wants by not only violating God's laws, but also the laws of every nation in the world.

In this presentation, we have chosen to make most of our comments on the positive side of the shepherd rather than the negative such as the robber and the thief.

Jesus also tells us that the sheep will not follow a stranger. If you are currently serving as a shepherd and the sheep are not following you, then maybe it is time to examine the flock to see if you have become a stranger to them. It may be that they no longer have respect for you. It may be that there has been such a growth in the flock that you know longer know the sheep. Or, you may no longer be meeting their needs as a shepherd. If so, then you need to take the appropriate action either to correct the deficiency in your leadership or ask to be relieved of the work.

Later, in John 10:11, we find that a good shepherd will give his life for the sheep. Jesus, therefore, is our good Shepherd in that He did give His life for us. Today, we, in all probability, will not be called on to die for those we are attempting to serve as a shepherd, but the principle is that we must have the willingness in our hearts to go to the fullest degree to protect and care for those for whom we are accountable before God.

You will note in John 10:12–13 that a hireling will not serve the sheep as God dictates that a shepherd must do because the hireling is only serving for the monetary gain. Therefore, when danger appears, he will flee and not provide the protection needed for the sheep. This person only accepts the work to better himself and could care less what happens to the sheep.

16

The fact that the sheep will be scattered, some lost and some caught by the aggressor, does not matter to him. Enough money cannot be paid to a hireling to get him to risk his life for those he has been hired to care for and watch over. We should learn from this that money is not sufficient to motivate us to give the proper care for those in our charge. The only motivation that will cause us to do that is love for God and our fellowman.

Paul's Meeting With The Elders From Ephesus

Now, read Acts 20:29–32 for further instructions. Paul tells the elders from Ephesus: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ..." Why would Paul make such a statement to these men to "take heed to yourselves," since he knew them well, had been with them over a period of time, and had fully taught them during his stay in Ephesus? He had, no doubt, gone

through some good and bad times with them and had seen them in such circumstances that he would know what type of men they were.

The reason he issued this warning was that he knew full well that Satan would not give up and that they would be attacked again and again by the evil one as they served as elders of God's people. He also knew that he would not be available to them in the future and, therefore, wanted them to be on guard as a leadership. He wanted them to guard against Satan's leading some of them away from God, which would cause others to also fall.

Even though they had been fully taught, it was obvious that it was possible for this teaching to slip away unless they were constantly on guard and remained well grounded in the faith at all times. Paul wanted them ever to be alert to Satan and his tactics of trying to cause division among the leaders in order to cause a split of His followers. He wants them watching for both the flock and themselves in order that all may be properly protected.

One of the ways this can be done is by seeing that the flock is properly fed. It would be impossible for them to make certain the flock is properly fed without being fed themselves. Unless they either hear or teach themselves, they will not know

17

what is being fed to the flock. Provided they know the truth and either teach themselves or make sure the truth is being taught, they will be fed in the process of feeding the flock. By this charge, elders are given a grave responsibility to make certain that God's word is accurately taught, both privately and publicly, in the congregation where they serve. In order for them to accomplish this, they must have knowledge of God's teachings and use this as the standard to measure the teaching being done.

They can, and do, in many cases, designate someone to do the actual teaching, but they remain fully responsible for what is being taught. Paul admonishes them to watch. This is a military term and he advised them to be on guard. They are to set up a line of protective measures to keep someone from surprising them. They are to be alert at all times and be ready to do battle, should the need arise, day or night.

The instruction to remember is also much needed since we, so many times, have a tendency to forget. God has been trying for centuries to get man to remember Him and submit to His will and He is still trying today. Man has always been prone to forget God and, therefore, it is imperative that we constantly be reminded to remember God. This is one reason why we must daily be fed on the Word to God to keep it foremost in our minds.

One should learn from this section of scripture that if we know God's Word, we stay alert, remain on guard, remember what we have been taught, and then obey the teachings, we will be partakers of an inheritance. Since Paul was both inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit and chose to give these elders this admonition on his final meeting with them, it appears that all leaders today need to heed these solemn

warnings and make the same preparation for their flocks over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers.

No man today can improve upon the Apostle's teachings even though we may call in the educated men of the day. These men can only instruct us in the ways of men unless they are knowledgeable in the Word of God.

God's Way is Right

Any instruction that we may receive today in regards to shepherding should have its principles rooted in the Word, or they

18

will be of little eternal value. Since the Bible was written at the direction of the Holy Spirit, it is applicable to all mankind for all times (II Timothy 3:16).

A Good Report From Without

Another thing we learn from the scriptures is that a man selected to serve as an elder in the church of the Lord should have "a good report from them which are without" (I Timothy 3:7).

We should never allow ourselves to fall into thinking that a good businessman would be a good elder in the church. He could be, but this is not the only good characteristic he needs to possess in order to qualify as a servant to serve others. While there will be some business decisions which need good judgment that must be made from time to time, one should not be selected to serve if he does not love the souls of men and women and have a deep love for God. The church is not a business and should not be operated as a business. Business decisions are usually based on sound economic principles and not upon serving the needs of man. God wants His people to be good stewards of their abilities and possessions, but more is expected of a leader than merely stewardship of his own possessions and abilities.

Be An Example in Word and Deed

The leader is to set the example for others to follow in all areas of service in the Kingdom (I Peter 5:3). God wants him to lead others to salvation by teaching the Word, both publicly and privately, with his voice and also with his manner of life. A part of the work is keeping the saved in a safe condition, teaching the lost, and caring for the needs of those entrusted to his care. This is a work that will require daily feeding and care because some of the sheep have a need on a daily basis. One that has demonstrated good business judgment will also need to have demonstrated a love for people prior to his being selected to serve others.

Regardless of our place of employment or the type of business we are in, those in the business world must look on us as honest, trustworthy, and fair in the business conducted by us. This means

that we are to take a stand for Biblical principles as we daily go about the performance of our job of the operation of our business. We must always stand for what is right from God's viewpoint and never allow ourselves to be lured into thinking that what is ethical in business is also acceptable to God. Most of the time business standards are far below those set out in the New Testament for us as Christians.

In Isaiah, we learn that God's ways are higher than man's ways (Isaiah 55:9) and this is certainly true today in our business climate. We, as Christians, must be very careful and constantly on guard to make sure that we do not allow ourselves to lower our business standards to that of the world. This is especially true of one who is preparing himself to be a leader of God's people. We will certainly be tempted from time to time by our competition to say or do things that would help us make a sale, get a signed contract, or be asked to provide a service.

In today's world, it is so refreshing to hear someone say about one of my brothers or sisters in Christ that they are as good as their word. This is the way it should always be. When we give our word, it is binding as a contract. If all of us would set our standards to do what is right in God's sight, then the courts would have much less to do in trying to reach settlements in business agreements and contracts.

We must also be good neighbors, good people in the community, and law abiding citizens of the state and nation in which we live as long as these laws are in accordance with God's laws. Our conduct must always be proper in public and private. This includes sporting events, parades, and other such places we might choose to attend, and this encompasses all phases of our lives. Too much emphasis cannot be placed on our conduct in our daily routine.

How Do Others See You?

How we see ourselves is not nearly as important as how others see us. My treatment of others will largely determine my usefulness as a leader in God's family. Should you like to get a good view of a man's conduct, why not go and talk with those with whom he works or those who work for him? This should always

be done when men are being considered to serve as leaders for God. We might ask the question, "Why is this so important?" When you are serving as a leader, many times you will be called on to help in giving advice regarding situations and conditions in the work place, in the community, or in the neighborhood. In order for us to give sound advice and proper solutions to these problems, we must have had some experience to fully understand the situation.

Many times elders will be called on to render decisions in disputes in business or other disagreements between Christians. In my judgment, Christians should always avail themselves of the opportunity to first settle their differences between themselves as we read in Matthew 18:15–20. Failing this, Elders are a good source of help in resolving our differences because they should be fair and wise in their judgments.

Let Us Develop Strong Leaders for God

Preparation for leadership should start at a very early age. Many characteristics of good leaders are learned and developed early in life. These qualities are learned and are not inherited. We are greatly influenced by our family, the church, the older generation, our environment, and our national leadership. However, there is no greater influence than that which comes from God's word.

We must begin now to teach and train young men to desire, and to prepare themselves, to become leaders for God for succeeding generations. This needs to begin in the home, be nurtured by the church, and encouraged by various individuals. Much time needs to be spent in the study of God's Word, always seasoning it with prayer. Regular prayers need to be offered up for those preparing themselves to be leaders.

The better prepared a chosen leader is at the time he accepts the office, the more effective he will be in serving the needs of the people he is to lead. Even with all the preparation we can give, the leader will continue to need the help and support of the Christians he is leading and the blessings of God. The leader should be fully aware that a congregation will not grow beyond the leadership's ability to lead them. Therefore, we need to begin now to

21

develop leaders who will be mature in order for the church to have strong leadership during the next generation. Leaders must also be ready and willing to use all opportunities to increase their leadership abilities by self study as well as participating in various leadership programs within the brotherhood. Would you accept a challenge? If so, why not select some young men and begin to prepare them to become leaders. Preparing leaders can be done in many ways.

You could begin by praying with them, inviting them for private study, giving them encouragement, or, possibly, taking them with you to visit the ill or needy. You should be selective of the activities in which you include them. Including them in selected activities can help them develop a strong desire to help others by showing them how this is done.

Just imagine how much good could be done by the preparation and development of leaders for God. We should readily recognize, however, that all those that we try to develop into leaders will not become leaders. It should bring great joy to us by having encouraged and trained someone for leadership in God's kingdom. Our future leaders will be much better equipped if we begin early in their lives to support and

develop them into the best they can be. Many times the only training some of our leaders receive is in the last few months before they are asked to serve. We find that Timothy, early in his life, was taught and trained by his mother and grandmother.

Names By Which They Are Called in the New Testament

Those referred to as leaders of the local congregation in the New Testament were called by several names and each title had some significance as to the service which was to be performed by them. The most common name in use today is the word elder. This is one who is older and more advanced in years, in experience, and wiser. Age alone does not qualify one for the work of a congregation leader; however, it is one of the necessities in helping to prepare one for such a role. In many cultures, such as the Far East, the older people are highly respected and their council is often sought. We find in God's Word that the older is to teach the younger (I Timothy).

22

Another term used today is bishop. This is one who oversees, superintends, or watches for others. This tells us that bishops are to guard or watch over our souls and lives. This denotes a part of the work leaders are to perform. This should not be looked on as a position of power, but rather a place of service.

The word pastor is also used to identify the leader as a man who will take care of the flock. They see the needs of the flock as whole as well as the needs of the individual members. In this presentation, we have chosen to give most of our thoughts to the concept of looking to him, the elder, as the shepherd of the flock because there is such a great need for this in the church today.

Elders, or pastors, serve as those who guide and direct others in their work and service to God in His church. A pastor is an elder and not a preacher. A preacher of the gospel can be an elder or pastor, but preachers seldom want to become one.

The word steward is also used to denote a leader (Titus 1:7). The word steward indicates that he manages the affairs of the church as God has set out in His instructions in the New Testament. Then, in Hebrews 13:7, stewards are referred to as leaders. A leader is one who is out front leading and is setting the proper example both in his life and in his teachings. The New Testament has much to say about the qualifications and work of those chosen to be leaders of the congregation and each leader should do an in-depth study of church leadership on his own.

The followers must know that the leaders will keep their discussion in confidence. The sheep need to be aware that an elder may reach a point where he will need to seek the input of his fellow elders. This should not be considered as a betrayal of confidence since the wisdom of several people on the same problem will, many times, offer better advice to the member. The individual elder may feel that the burden is too great to bear alone and needs the support of his fellow elders. It is a good idea, when someone comes to you for advice, that you tell him or her at the

beginning of the conversation that you reserve the right to call in other elders if you feel it advisable.

23

Most of those seeking help will agree to such an arrangement. Agreement is needed to keep the trust of the individual involved. The elder does not have the right to openly discuss the details of the discussion with others. If he does, then others will refuse to seek his council in the future.

Each Elder is Subject to the Eldership

The congregation and the individual elder needs to be fully aware that each elder is individually subject to the whole eldership. No one elder has the right and authority to go out on his own and do what he feels is right. He must be subject to the other elders serving with him and have confidence and respect for their input on issues involving the teaching and direction of the congregation.

Most elders have great comfort and joy in knowing that the elders are watching on behalf of their souls and lives. There is a constant need for each elder to make sure that he does not assume a position that is contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

Time for Meditation, Prayer, and Study

An elder needs to spend much time in prayer, individually and with others, to make sure that he continues to depend on God and is always seeking to do things His way. He must continually measure the teaching being done in the congregation by the scriptures to make sure that that which is taught is scriptural and is what is needed. At times it will be necessary for him to teach individuals.

Elders must take a firm stand for truth at all times. Satan will always be there to try to influence some of the sheep and the elder must be constantly alert to protect the sheep from his lies. In order for the elder to have a good understanding of the Word, he must spend time in study and meditation. This will, of course, mean that he will need to spend some time alone in thought and consideration of what God wants in his life and the lives of those for which he is accountable.

Many times this is hard to schedule because of the constant demand upon his time. A suggestion would be for you to get away

24

with no one or only your wife around for a period of time. It may mean that you set aside a time to leave town or go to the library to study.

Maybe you could read a section of scripture before going on a trip and get it firmly fixed in your mind. Then, as you drive, think and meditate on the scripture you have read. For some, the early morning hours are best, while others have other times of the day or night that are best for them. If you fly a great deal, time on the plane or in the airport, may be a good time for you. Each of us knows when we can meditate and we should take advantage of the opportunities that best fit us in this matter.

Elders must be fully aware at all times that they are trying to lead the flock safely to heaven. To do this, the elder must consistently walk with the Lord. On a daily basis, we are to lead those in the congregation to put their faith to work for the Lord. When this is done, Satan has less opportunity to slip in and claim some of those under our watchful care. We must be constantly aware that God's way will lead us to salvation. The ways of men will not be acceptable in the day of judgment unless their ways are the ways determined by God.

Why Serve as a Leader

There are many reasons why a Christian will serve as a leader. We will only include a few in this discussion.

First of all, we must allow God to use us as He sees fit. If God has blessed us with the ability to lead and those in the congregation have asked us to lead, then we should allow ourselves to be used to serve God in this way.

Secondly, if the congregation looks to you as a leader, this means that they have confidence in you, and you should respect their judgment and agree to serve them. We should willingly agree to serve. We should never allow the politics of a congregation to put us in the eldership.

Another reason is the great joy that will come as you are allowed to help others live a godly life. There are a number of joyful times that all who have served as elders can reflect back on, and have their hearts feel warm. It may come from a word that someone has spoken about you, such as, "Go see him. He will do all that he can

to help you." Or, you may receive a letter from someone telling you how you have helped him through some difficult times. It could be a thank you note or a love note expressing how others feel about you, or a phone call asking you to pray with them for someone in their family or for a friend. When we look back on times such as these, we are well paid for the service which we have rendered. The greatest reward, however, is still to come. The opportunities that will come to you to guide and lead others to God's truths should appeal to you. There is no greater joy than to know that you have been used as an instrument to lead another to follow Jesus. We should allow God to help us fully develop ourselves into what He wants us to be. None of us knows what He has planned for us, but we need to let Him have His way in our lives.

When Help and Counsel Are Sought

When others come to you for help or counsel, you must show your willingness and your desire to give of your time and the help of which you are capable. You should allow them to do most of the talking while you listen carefully to try to identify the real problem.

Very few people who come to you for the first time will openly define the problem for you. They will give you some of the information about what is troubling them, but will usually give this information a little at a time. You can ask some questions which will make them feel more comfortable and, thereby, reveal to you more clearly what is really bothering them. A thorough understanding of the situation must be gained before giving an answer. It may mean that, if others are involved, it will be necessary to contact them and get their input.

Most of the time, when two or more are involved, there will be conflicting views. Each person presents his view and, after you have this information, it is much easier to look at the alternatives. We should, first of all, ask the person or persons what they see as possible solutions. There are usually a number of alternatives, each with different consequences. For instance, if it is sin and they do not repent, one of the alternatives is that they will be lost at the judgment. It may be that the sin is private and needs to be dealt with between the person and God, or it may be of such a nature that they may have to contact several others and as for their forgiveness.

26

It may be of such a public nature that they will need to publicly acknowledge the sin. The alternatives will vary with each case and with each individual. You will be able to suggest some alternatives, but the final choice will have to be made by the individual. You should advise them that you will only support them in that which is right and will discourage them in doing wrong. In listening to them, you should never give the impression that you are agreeing with them, unless, of course, you are in agreement. Sometimes, nodding your head or acknowledging that you hear what they are saying, will make them think that you agree.

There have been situations where someone has been left with a misunderstanding which will later cause problems. We should not show "shock," even though, at times, we will be thoroughly shocked. Displaying shock can give the feeling to the individual that he has come to the wrong place for help with his problems. It could also make them think that the problem is just too bad to be dealt with or does not have a solution.

Never fail to seek professional help or to offer to help them find professional help if this is needed. We should not pretend that we can deal with matters that we are not trained and skilled in resolving. An honest answer is always the best one to give anyone seeking help. If you think you can help, tell them, and begin immediately helping them deal with the problem. If the problem needs to be referred to others, then advise them accordingly.

Many problems develop in relationships between individuals and groups, and we should be ready to point out that there are a number of Bible principles that, of

necessity, must apply. These are such things as honesty, fairness, going the extra mile, and being willing to forbear and show love at all times for the other person.

The Eldership Must be United

In order for the eldership to function in such a way as to set the proper spirit with the congregation, there must be unity in the eldership. Each elder should be given an opportunity to fully express his views on all matters which are discussed in the elders meetings. However, once a decision is made, it is imperative that the decision be fully supported by each individual elder, both publicly and privately.

27

One group of elders adopted a rather unique decision making process which might be well to consider using. After the decisions were made, the elder presiding would ask for a show of hands for those in favor and those opposed. Even though the vote was taken, it was not recorded. If a majority were for the proposition, the elder presiding would announce it and, at that time, a second vote would be taken. All elders would vote the way the majority had voted in the first vote. This also would be true if the majority opposed the motion. This was unique in that all decisions of the elders were unanimous. This vote would then be recorded in the minutes of the elders meeting. Therefore, this process allowed them to always be united in their decisions.

Even if this is not done, each individual elder is to support the decision of the majority of elders. It is not necessary for the members to be aware of the views of each individual elder once a decision has been made. Each individual elder must openly support each decision of a majority of the elders or serious problems will result. All of us have differences of opinion, but we must allow decisions to be made by the majority.

All decisions need to be carefully written and recorded in the minutes in order to prevent misunderstandings. When an elder is absent from a meeting and a decision is made by the majority of elders, the absent elder must support the decision even though he did not have an opportunity to express his views. Most elderships will delay a vote, especially on highly important issues, until all elders have expressed their views.

Each eldership should set policies on these matters. It is usually wise to have all the elders express themselves on weighty issues. It goes without saying that none of us should ever support any position that is unscriptural, even if a majority of the eldership should vote for such a decision.

In order for an eldership to have unity, each individual elder must have respect for his fellow elders. Doing this sets the example for the congregation and helps the members show proper respect for each elder. This means that we do not allow

28

differences to come between us. When disagreements arise, then we are to go to one another and seek to resolve these matters so that disunity will not result (Matthew 18:15–22).

Without a unified eldership, it is not possible to have a unified congregation. God hates division (I Corinthians 1:10, 11:18; Proverbs 6:1–19). Christ prayed that we might be one (John 17:11). The elders are God's leaders and they must be unified in their work of service to the congregation.

Elders Serve All of the Congregation

Individual elders will be approached from time to time by various groups asking them to support them in some special program. Great care should be taken by the entire eldership to make sure that special interest groups are not granted favors that would cause problems to arise. An individual elder should not lead them to think that he will attempt to persuade other elders to support their efforts. He can advise them that he will arrange for them to meet with the entire eldership, or tell them to present their desires in writing which will be presented to the eldership. Should an individual elder begin to show interest in various groups, problems will arise.

Individual elders might find themselves becoming spokesmen for various groups such as youth, young marrieds, older adults, etc. This will put the entire eldership in a difficult situation. It could even cause division. If it does not cause division, it will create problems that will have to be dealt with in the future. Elders should always remember that they are to shepherd the entire flock and that they should be interested in all groups and in each individual Christian. Individual elders should not seek support from other members or elders in order to get their way in decision making. This is unfair to the other elders and to the congregation they are serving.

An elder should not poll the other elders before meetings in order to gain their support before all the other elders have had an opportunity to review the request. A careful review of the proposition and prayer should precede the decision. This does not mean that an elder cannot discuss a matter with other elders, but he should not ask them for support until all of the elders have been given a chance to carefully review the matter.

It may sometimes be necessary to take a telephone poll of the elders. All of the should be polled and not just selected ones that support us in our desires. Most of the time a decision can wait for an elders meeting and this is where the decision should be made.

An elder does not need to get the approval of his family before he votes. In fact, his family should be informed of a decision at the same time all other members of the congregation are made aware of it. This is necessary to protect family members from being put into a difficult position when asked if they know what is going to be done about a matter. It can keep them from revealing something before it is ready to be announced and from divulging information to someone they know. Knowing that a

decision has been made, but has not been revealed, can cause unrest within the congregation. Most of the time decisions should be immediately communicated to the congregation or to individuals involved; however, sometimes delaying the release of this information may be necessary.

Elders Must Communicate to the Congregation

The biggest difficulty that arises many times is the elders lack of communication with the members. Decisions being made by the elders, and the desires and direction in which the elders are taking the congregation, are not communicated to the members. The reasons why specific sermons are being preached, why specific classes are being held, and why members are asked to attend special sessions are not communicated to them. The elders must be aware that unless they have open communication with the congregation, it is very difficult to get the congregation to follow the lead of the elders. Many times the congregations members will see what is being done today with no idea that it is being done to prepare them for the future.

Public announcements, for the most part, are a very poor way to communicate. Public announcements are generally ineffective in getting across the intended message. Good, open communications must use all of the available means of communication. Communication must be ongoing, with members given the opportunity to volunteer some input regarding their feelings and desires. This does not mean that all of their desires will be met, but it gives them an opportunity to express their desires and, if their desires cannot be met, an opportunity for the elders to explain why they cannot be met. This is a major part of communications. Simply telling the members is not effective because it does not facilitate two-way communication. There must be communication with the members in such a manner as to facilitate a dialog with the individual member such as visiting in the home, visiting in the class,

30

making calls to the workplace, to the school, and wherever the members are regularly found. By doing this, we can allow the members to express their concerns to us individually or in small groups.

Many members have great difficulty expressing themselves in large groups. Most can more easily express themselves in one-on-one situations. If we do what we can to make it possible to communicate in one-on-one situations as frequently as possible, we can more readily keep abreast of the needs and desires of all the members.

There are many ways to communicate and we need to use all the available methods in order to keep the congregation informed.

Good communication helps us to know how to better lead the congregation and gives us insight into the individual needs of the members. Communication is at its best when the congregation is kept fully informed by the elders and the elders have a good understanding of the individual members of the congregation.

Present and Future Growth of the Church

For the church to have the growth that was experienced during the first century, it must return to those principles and commitments that characterized the early Christians. One of these characteristics was the leadership. Many believe that a return to the evangelistic fervor of the first century will, of necessity, have to begin with the leadership. Those chosen to serve must regularly consider their service in light of the teaching of the New Testament.

The elders must see that the congregation is properly fed at times and, daily, make certain that the needs of the sheep are met. They must involve themselves in leading others from sin to salvation, so that those in the congregation where they serve will be encouraged by their example and become involved in soul winning. They must also lead the congregation to a point where most of the money and energy of the congregation is used in teaching the gospel to the lost and developing the saved.

What the elders, as leaders, accomplish during the next few years will greatly impact the future growth and scripturalness of the church for generations to come. God, at many times in past ages, led His people to greater areas of service, and He will today if the elders will allow Him to use them in the way He sees fit.

31

Difficult Situations Will Arise

Those serving as leaders will, at times, be unjustly criticized. They need to be aware of this and not let it hinder their service to God. At times, their families will be spoken of in an unkindly manner. This can cause the leader to want to strike back, but they should go to those that are doing this and try to reason with them about these matters. There will always be a few that will try to discourage someone from serving. The elder should always listen to what each individual has to say and should carefully consider what is being said. If corrections need to be made, the elders should readily make them. Otherwise, the elders should not allow a few to dictate the direction the elders take for God.

Mistakes will be made. The leadership should use these mistakes to grow in their relationship to God and to others. Bad judgments will be made. These can serve as causes for reassessment and help the elders to be better able to serve in the future. Each elder, as one of those serving as the leaders of the congregation, should grow daily.

I hope that this book will either encourage you to prepare yourself to be a better leader in the future, or to make an effort to help train others to become leaders.

32



NOT TO BE SOLD

You can receive free Bible correspondence courses
by writing to World Bible School.

WORLD BIBLE SCHOOL

P.O. Box 2169
Cedar Park, Texas 78630-2169

For further study of the Bible or a
place to worship, please contact the
Church of Christ nearest you.

MISSION PRINTING, INC.

"World Evangelism by the Printed Page"

A Work of Churches of Christ

2707 Medlin Dr.
Arlington, Texas 76015

missionprinting@gmail.com
www.missionprinting.us

Back Cover