

Zaffar's
1/2/88

Deacon/Elder Lecture Outlines

Lecture 9

The Duties and Responsibilities of a Local Church Elder (Part II)

I. Introduction

In the last session we covered the definition of a local church elder, his place within the government of God and proper methods of service.

We continue with the basic responsibilities of a local church elder.

II. Duties and Responsibilities

The actual day-to-day duties of local church elders can be broken down into two rough categories: 1) Those duties of a general nature which the Bible ascribes or implies to elders, and 2) those duties of a more specific nature which the pastor assigns.

A. Responsibilities commanded, defined, shown by example or inferred from the Bible

1. Teach

An elder must be apt to teach, according to the qualifications for ordination given in the Bible (I Timothy 3:2).

To teach means to instruct others in God's way from both an academic and practical point of view.

2. Preach

Preaching denotes public teaching to groups as opposed to one-on-one teaching. Preaching is clearly the job and prerogative of the ordained ministry (II Timothy 4:2). This does not exclude the assignment of deacons and leading unordained men to sermonettes which are viewed as training opportunities.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong often stated that the ability to preach was not needed by those ordained to rank of local elder. Still, since many of our

local elders can preach, their abilities are taken advantage of with sermonettes, sermons and Bible studies.

3. Counsel

Counseling is one-on-one advice-giving.

4. Encourage

Encouragement is verbal support and aid, usually done on a personal basis. Many epistles have whole sections devoted to the encouragement of the brethren. See, for example, Hebrews 12. It is obviously a valid function of the ministry at all levels.

5. Judge

To judge is to decide a matter at issue between parties. The Church clearly has authority to decide such issues (I Corinthians 6:1-5), especially in the persons of its elders. Many matters of this nature should be referred to the pastor, depending upon the circumstances. See also Matthew 18:15-20.

6. Correct

The ministry is permitted -- and indeed commanded -- to correct those bound in sin. However, usually this function should be handled only by the pastor or one he delegates it to (Hebrews 13:17).

7. Anoint

Anointing the sick is a duty specifically assigned to all elders (James 5:14).

8. Set a Good Example

Setting the example is one of the most important duties of all elders of whatever rank. Paul was conscious of his own example, and even cited it from time to time (I Thessalonians 2:10, II Thessalonians 3:7).

9. Be Hospitable

Hospitality is the act of extending your home, possessions and self to others. It is an important trait of an elder, commanded by the Bible (I Timothy 3:2), and rooted in love toward God's brethren.

B. Responsibilities delegated by the local pastor

The categories of duty mentioned above are very general in nature and are common to one degree or another to all elders of whatever rank. Each pastor has the latitude, within broad guidelines, to fulfill these duties through his local elders in the ways that seem best under the circumstances.

Note: All local elders should recognize that not every elder will participate in every one of the following specific duties, nor, when they are assigned them, to the same degree as every other elder. Pastors are allowed to make such decisions for themselves based upon their needs, the talents of their men, their personal style, etc. More will be said about this below.

1. Sermonettes

Many elders, but not all, are assigned sermonettes. This is one, but not the only, way an elder can partially fulfill his calling to teach.

2. Sermons

Probably many elders do not give sermons, but some do if they have talent in this area. This is up to the prerogative of the pastor depending upon the circumstances.

3. Bible Studies

The type of teaching that a Bible study requires is different from a sermonette. Some men will be better suited to this than to sermonettes. Helping out in a Bible study is a valid way to serve should the pastor need the help.

4. Activities and Projects

Certain projects and activities may be led by deacons, but certain other types might be better suited to the skill of one of the church's elders. This is an important way to serve and of much benefit to the pastor.

5. Visiting

Pastors may wish their elders to do some visiting if their time and talents permit. Usually these visits would be more of a general nature and with baptized members only. Problem visits, counseling

prospective members or handling crises normally would be handled by the pastor. However, even then the pastor may need your help as an assistant.

6. Anointing

Routine anointing is an important but sometimes time-consuming duty. The pastor may delegate some of this to you.

7. After-church Counseling

The time after services each Sabbath is often busy with questions from the members. The pastor may delegate to you some of these duties so he can concern himself with the more serious or pressing ones which demand his personal attention.

Generally, when a member presents a serious problem to a local church elder asking for counsel, the elder should advise the member that he must bring this matter to the church pastor. It is always the church pastor who must make the decision whether he should personally handle it or delegate it to the elder.

III. Duties (Not) Part of an Elder's Responsibilities

Knowing one's duties sometimes also involves knowing the limits to one's duties. Although Mr. Tkach encourages full utilization of every elder's abilities within local circumstances, he also wishes to reserve certain functions to the salaried ministers.

Certain duties are reserved to the pastor because these duties require the extra experience and training which the pastor has been given. They are also reserved to him because the pastor is the one held responsible for the overall welfare of the church and hence the one who must involve himself in those matters which most affect its growth.

(A) Discipline

Most cases of discipline should be handled by the pastor. If you see a circumstance which you feel may call for such action, explain the details to the pastor and he will decide how the matter should be handled.

B. Serious-Problem Counseling

Problems which are serious in nature, such as marital problems, demon problems, attitude problems and doctrinal problems, are the domain of the pastor. He may call upon your assistance in some way, and if he does you should be ready to offer the advice or help he needs. But the overall situation should be counseled by him.

C. Prospective-Member Visits

Many pastors have their elders perform general, sick or encouragement visits. But Mr. Tkach expects the salaried ministers to have first contact with prospective members, and to continue with whatever visiting is necessary to bring them to membership. After the church pastor has made initial contact, he may ask the elders to work with prospective members to answer questions and to be hospitable.

D. Oversight of Deacons in a Line Capacity

It is common to appoint an elder over a large project and have deacons temporarily report to the elder in a physical matter like a fund-raiser. But deacons should not be permanently assigned to certain elders. Deacons should not be placed in a position where they may come to the pastor only through elders. No local elder is over any deacon in a permanent-line capacity. All report directly to the pastor and his assistant or associate in spiritual matters. This is why the church pastor should rotate the duties assigned to deacons so that they are not continuously reporting to a local church elder instead of the pastor.

E. Baptism Counseling

Generally speaking, the baptism counseling to be done in a local area is the responsibility of salaried elders. In some cases, you may be asked to handle a session or two of preliminary baptism counseling, but in almost all cases the final counseling and decision to baptize will be by a salaried elder.

F. Ceremonies

Certain church ceremonies are routinely assigned to elders, such as the oversight of a Passover service in a multi-church circuit where the pastor must be somewhere else. However, certain other ceremonies are in the public eye and should as much as possible be performed by a salaried minister.

Most funerals and weddings fall under this latter category. However, when illness or other circumstances prevent it, the pastor may assign the job to his elder if the local law permits (some states, for example, may not allow unsalaried elders to perform weddings for which a license is required). It is the pastor's prerogative, however. Members should understand that funerals or weddings in his area fall to the pastor or associate pastor unless he gives permission otherwise.

Baptisms may be performed by a local church elder if the pastor directs him to do so. Even then, however, the counseling and decision to baptize will have been done by a salaried elder.

IV. Factors Determining Differing Use of Elders

The numerous responsibilities mentioned here cover a very broad range. A little thought and reflection should show that not every elder will have every responsibility of every other elder. Sometimes jealousies develop between leaders because of differences in responsibilities. Of course, this should not be the case. In fact, such wrong attitudes themselves indicate that the leader with such internal jealousy needs to examine his own motives for service.

Still, it can be helpful to briefly list some of the reasons why responsibilities differ between elders. This helps us see that the reasons are often physical and commonsense and not indications of favoritism or level of conversion. Here are some of the more common reasons for different people to have different responsibilities.

A. Age

Some jobs require the energy of youth and therefore a youthful man. Others require more maturity and experience.

B. Abilities or Skills

Certain jobs or roles, like speaking, may require certain natural abilities. Apollos, for example, was a talented speaker with natural ability in that area (Acts 18:24). Certain other jobs or roles, like leading a youth group, may require abilities or skills of a different sort. One job or person is not more righteous than another.

C. Education

Certain responsibilities require more or a different type of education than another job. A person with accounting skills might be able to give a Bible study on budgeting better than a man who is a wildlife expert. On the other hand, the second man might be better to lead a teen hike.

D. Experience

Our experiences are unique and give us insight into certain types of things. This difference in experience obviously qualifies us or disqualifies us from certain types of service.

E. Personality

Certain types of personality tend to be effective in certain types of circumstances and with certain types of people. It is natural for the pastor to try and match the man's personality with the needs the pastor has.

F. Pastor's Preferences

Different pastors reserve to themselves slightly different specific duties, and delegate those which seem wise to them. Such differences in type and style of delegation are normal and to be expected.

G. Geographical Area

A western area with western-type people may not respond well to an elder who moves into the area from the east. Such a man might have had an impact on his prior church that he may never have in his new one. People simply often respond best to the type of people they are most like.

H. Conversion Level

This has been put last because it is usually thought of first when men are seen to differ in responsibility in the local church. It is indeed a factor, but as can be seen, not the only one and in a given case it may not be a consideration at all.

V. Common Problem Areas

The elders of God's Church have a long and impressive record of service to God's people. But we are all human and must be constantly on the lookout for our human nature. It is important in this context to briefly note

certain common dangers that all elders must be on the lookout for in their own ministry.

A. Vanity

Pride or vanity affects all humans to some degree. It is a quality God hates (Proverbs 6:17).

B. Competition

One of Satan's most common and infectious attitudes is that of competition. It is pervasive in this society but must be shunned by us in favor of love and the spirit of cooperation. We are to serve others, look after their needs and in general exalt God and our brethren and not ourselves. Remember Christ's example -- not of competition and grasping for self, but of service (Philippians 2:4).

C. Disloyalty

Elders are to be, by definition, faithful men who are able to loyally work with and teach others (II Timothy 2:2). Disloyalty to Pasadena is disloyalty to Christ. And the notion that some have that they can somehow be loyal to Mr. Tkach and Christ and headquarters and yet be disloyal to their local pastor as he follows Christ, Mr. Tkach and headquarters is utter nonsense. The local pastor is part of the government of God and deserves the loyalty of the local elders as long as the pastor does not remove himself from God's chain of government or is not removed from it by those over him.

D. Presumptuousness

A tendency exists in some to assume they have certain qualifications, rights, duties or prerogatives which they in fact do not possess. It behooves all of us to be careful not to exercise ourselves in matters not our concern. Read Psalm 131:1, James 4:13-15 and II Peter 2:10.

E. Personal Sin

None of us is beyond the wiles of the devil and the pulls of the flesh. We must be constantly on vigil lest the lusts of the flesh snare us into vice of some sort like overdrinking, overeating, gambling, adultery, etc. (Galatians 5:17-21).

F. Example

Setting the example is an important part of an elder's responsibilities. Setting a good example is a powerful builder of people. Setting a bad example will undo much good and, unfortunately, more than offsets our good qualities.

VI. Rewards of Service

As can be seen by now, the job of a local church elder is a challenging one indeed. It requires, quite literally, superhuman strength in the form of God's Spirit to fulfill.

Still, the rewards for faithful service are many, and include:

A. Satisfaction

One of the most enjoyable parts of life is to contribute to the personal and spiritual growth of others.

B. Personal Knowledge

It is impossible for an elder or any minister to engage in helping and teaching others without himself learning many things.

C. Personal Character Growth

In addition to learning new things, our service to God's people develops many qualities of character within us -- such as patience, love, etc.

D. Greater Reward

We are to be rewarded according to our works. Those who do the most works will receive the greater rewards.

VII. Conclusion

God is always looking for a few good men to serve as elders in His Church. Those of us who have been chosen, out of God's mercy, for the job must take our responsibilities seriously. By so doing, we will be helping God prepare good sons and daughters for His Kingdom.

