

Elders 2

by Anton Bosch

Anton Bosch's sermon emphasizes the character and sacrificial nature required of elders in the church, contrasting true shepherds with hirelings and outlining the seriousness of ordination and accountability.

Duration: 46:54

Scripture: Psalm 23:1, 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Topics: "Elders"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses various fears that people have, such as terrorism, political instability, and financial crises. He emphasizes the importance of being there for one another and finding peace in the midst of a turbulent world. The preacher also highlights the role of elders in guiding and comforting the congregation during difficult times. He urges people to submit to the authority of elders and warns of the consequences of straying from the path of righteousness. Ultimately, the preacher reminds the audience that they will be held accountable for their actions by the great shepherd.

Transcript

Read with me, please, from 1 Timothy chapter 3, 1 Timothy chapter 3, and we'll read the first 13 verses. We're dealing with elders, and we're going to conclude with elders tonight. I thought that I wouldn't be able to have enough material for one, for this study, but in fact there is, there's more than enough, so we probably have a problem finishing in time again, and we will allow a short period of questions afterwards, but we do have communion, so we don't want to spend too much time in the questions.

So, 1 Timothy chapter 3, and verse 1. This is a faithful saying. If a man desires the bishop, the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. Now, we established last week that a bishop, an elder, a shepherd, and a pastor are all the same thing.

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous. Verse 4, one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence. For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

Moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into the reproach and the snare of the devil. Verse 8, likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given too

much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested, and let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.

Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Now, we touched very briefly on the qualifications of elders last week, and I'm not going to go through the list. You have the list if there are those who want notes. I think there are still a few notes left over from last week that we handed out on Wednesday night.

But we do have these two lists in Timothy and in Titus. And I just want to comment on the fact that you'll see that if you go through these lists of qualifications for elders that the qualifications have to do with character and not with skills. It doesn't say an elder must be good at dealing with people.

We would assume that that would be necessary, but in fact the script, it doesn't say so. The only skill that it speaks about is apt to teach, able to teach. And we'll speak in a moment about teaching elders and ruling elders.

That doesn't mean that they must be teachers, but they must be able to teach those who are young in the faith. But the emphasis here is on the character of the man, on who he is, on his integrity, on his holiness of living, on his relationship with God, on his testimony in the world and his testimony in the church. These are the issues.

Because an elder does not have to perform in the same way as a preacher or a teacher has to be able to. What he really does is he leads by his example. And by virtue of his experience in life, he is able to counsel and to give advice to those who are younger in the faith.

And so the most important thing is one of character. We spoke this morning about David. And the characteristic that God sought for in David was not his ability to fight or his ability to be a great king or a great general, but a right heart.

And that is true of elders also, that God is concerned more about the heart of the man than his skills and his abilities. Now, in the Gospel of John chapter 10, and I think we read this passage last week, John chapter 10, Jesus tells the parable or likens himself as the great shepherd and other shepherds to two shepherds who look after sheep. And we said last week that there are many parallels.

There are many similarities between shepherds who look after physical sheep and elders and between sheep and Christians. And in John chapter 10, Jesus speaks about the characteristics here of himself as the good shepherd. And I want you to just notice in verse 11, and of course we can go into much detail here, but the fact that it is in verse 11, it says, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.

I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and I am known by my own. And so Jesus is the great shepherd, and obviously we take our cues from him. We learn from him the things that are necessary in order to function as under-shepherds, so to speak, under him.

And he makes this one big distinction between himself and other shepherds. And he says the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And then he speaks about hirelings, people who are paid to look after the sheep, but to whom the sheep do not belong.

And in the church today there are many men who are set up as shepherds or as elders, but who are hirelings. They work for a wage. Now, there's nothing wrong being paid a wage.

The laborer is worthy of his hire, and Paul teaches about that in great detail. But the fact is that if we are doing it, if it is a career, if men are in the job or in the ministry of any kind of ministry, but particularly that of shepherding or pastoring as a job for the money, he is not a true shepherd. And there are many problems that come with that.

But it all boils down to this one issue that the true shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep, as Jesus laid down his life for us. We as shepherds, those of us who are shepherds here, need to be willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of the sheep. You see, the hireling is only interested in himself and what he can get out of that.

Remember, that was the accusation against the shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel 34, that you have robbed the sheep and you have taken from the sheep for yourselves, but you have not fed them. And when it came to drinking of the water, what you did was you drank first, and then you muddied the water, made the water full of mud, so that the other sheep, when they have to come and drink, they have to drink muddy water. That's what a hireling does.

The true shepherd feeds the sheep first, and then himself. And if necessary, and we've spoken before about the fact that we say, Lord, I'll die for you, but he's not asking us to die for him, but sometimes he asks us to give up small things. And we're not prepared to do that, but we'll die for him.

And many pastors and elders will say, I will give my life for the sheep, but when it comes to giving up some of their time or some of their salary or something else, then it becomes too much of a problem. And so the heart of a true shepherd is that he is willing to make the sacrifices. He is willing to make the sacrifices.

He is not asking people to do things that he is not willing to do. And he is not driving the sheep and running away when there are problems, or when things are too hard. And so I trust that each one here who has the responsibility of leading will have the heart of the true shepherd.

And if necessary, die for the sheep. The context here in John 10, Jesus speaks and he says, I am the door of the sheep. And what he was speaking about was that in those days, because they had many wild animals, the sheep would be brought into a corral, into a sheep fold, which would be made up of rocks sometimes, or sometimes of branches of trees that have been felled.

And so there would be a walled enclosure in which the sheep would be safe. But the shepherd would be the door. He would sleep in the doorway of the sheep fold.

And so if a lion wanted to come against the sheep, as we heard this morning about David who defended the sheep against the lion and the bear, he was a true shepherd, a hireling who was being paid wages. Those sheep belonged to him. They were his father's sheep.

They were his sheep. And he said, I'm not allowing the bear or the lion to get away with one man. And I will put my life in jeopardy to save and to protect that which has been put in my care.

That's the heart of a true shepherd. And I think that in that lies one of the reasons why God selected him to lead Israel, as the great shepherd of Israel, in the sense of being the king, the one who would shepherd Israel, because he showed faithfulness, even in the small things of looking after the least little lambs that the lion and the bear would take. And so when the lion and the bear would come against the sheep in the sheep fold, they would have to come through the shepherd first.

He would be the first one to be attacked because he would be in the door. He would be in the gate. And now sometimes I think when you remember Jacob, I don't know that Jacob was a good shepherd because remember what he did when he came up against his brother.

He heard his brother was coming and he was going back to his homeland. He divided all his things, his possessions, and he sent a parcel of sheep and camels and all the other things first. And he said, well, maybe, you know, if my brother takes those, then maybe he'll be happy and he'll spare the rest.

And then there was another lot and another lot and another lot. And then at the back was his wives. And then he was right at the very end.

And he said, maybe by the time my brother gets to me, he'll be satisfied. His wrath will be appeased and he'll get taken what he wants and he's going to spare me. The true shepherd would say, no, the enemy is coming.

Let me put myself in front. Let me be there where the brunt of the attack is going to be, that I may be able to protect the sheep. All right.

We spoke about ordination. And we spoke about - we did not speak about who ordains. This is a question which people often ask.

Who ordains elders? And in the New Testament, elders would be ordained by the apostles who had started a particular church. You remember Paul and Barnabas. They went out.

They started those churches, came back, and they ordained elders in those churches. We can see that in Titus. He gives instruction to Titus to ordain elders.

And presumably these were not necessarily churches that Titus had started but that Paul had started. But Titus and Paul were working together as an apostolic team, so to speak. And so they ordained.

But now the problem is today in the 21st century, many churches have not been founded by apostles. Or other churches were founded by apostles a long time ago, but those apostles are no longer on the scene. So who ordains elders today? And, of course, the Scripture makes no provision for that.

But sufficient to say that if it is a church which is in existence and there are existing elders, then those existing elders would appoint other elders. You don't have to go and find somebody who is an apostle and we're going to deal with a whole ministry of apostles in a few weeks' time. But you don't have to go and find somebody else out there who may be an apostle in another area to come and do that job.

Local brothers who are leading in the local church, they can ordain elders. Now, one of the other points about ordaining elders is 1 Timothy 5 and verse 22. 1 Timothy 5, 22.

Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins. Keep yourself pure. And the context here is he's dealing with elders.

And we know that when elders are ordained, hands are laid on them. I know in some circles they would anoint them with oil. The Scripture, there is nothing in the New Testament about anointing elders or any other ministry with oil when they are being appointed.

1 Timothy 5, verse 22. But the sign of laying hands on them is the way that it is done in the New Testament. And you can go through the various occasions when people were ordained and you'll find that they laid hands on them.

I think the practice of anointing men with oil for ordination comes from the Old Testament. Remember this morning we read about David. He was anointed with oil by Samuel.

That was the way they did it in the Old Testament, a sign, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. But the warning here is not to lay hands on anyone hastily or suddenly in the old King James, nor to share in other people's sins. This is a very, very serious step.

I think most churches don't understand the seriousness of the issue of ordaining elders. You'll see that when Paul and these guys ordained elders, they fasted and prayed before they ordained men. And here he's warning Timothy and he says, don't do this in a hurry.

Don't be hasty to ordain people. Because in the process, when we lay hands on someone, one of the things that we are doing is that we are identifying with that person. We are saying, we are one with you.

And when we are ordaining them in the ministry, we are saying that we are one with you and we are in support of you, and you are with us and we are with you. Now if that individual is sinful, then we are making what he is saying here is that we are sharing in that person's sin. Especially if we know that there is sin in the person's life.

So a man has a spiritual problem, and we ordain him as an elder and we lay hands on him, while we know that he has a problem, we are sharing in his sin. Because what we are doing is we are saying, brother, it's okay for you to carry on this kind of life and to become an elder in the church. And so we need to be careful.

You will remember that when we read from 1 Timothy chapter 3 concerning deacons, it says that they need to be proven or tested. And so any ministry needs to be proven or tested before we can ordain them. Today it just happens too easily.

You do a seminary course and you spend a couple of months in a church and they will ordain you. In fact, you don't even have to do those things now. You can write in on the internet.

You go on the internet and there are dozens of places where you can buy ordination for \$25 or \$50 without any kind of spiritual ability or gifting or training or anything. And so Paul said, no, don't do that. Be careful.

All right. Sinning elders. And we're just dealing with all little bits and pieces this evening and concluding the series.

Can elders sin? Well, obviously, they are human and they do sin. What do we do when an elder sins? Well, obviously, Matthew chapter 18, remember, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he doesn't hear you, take witnesses.

And if he doesn't hear them, tell it to the whole church. Now, that would apply to anyone. But particularly to elders, there is an extra warning.

And we find that in 1 Timothy chapter 5, where we've been, 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 19. Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Now, one of the problems with leadership in the church is that the devil is seeking to destroy every one of us, but especially leaders.

And one of the ways that he is able to bring an attack against a leader or an elder is by bringing or by circulating rumors. And anyone who has been in leadership for some time in the church will know that this is a huge problem. Because it's easy just to begin a rumor.

Oh, you know, I saw John do this and this. And the next person says, oh, I saw John do this and this times two. And before you know, the man's reputation is destroyed.

But not only his reputation, his ministry. Because remember that he is selected based on character. And when he no longer has that character because it's been destroyed, his ministry falls apart.

He has no basis for ministry any longer. And so when accusation is brought against elders, they need to be by witnesses. You cannot bring an accusation and say, I heard.

Brother so and so did this or did that. If somebody tells you they heard a leader do this or do that, you are not to receive that accusation. You need to say, did you see him do that? Are there witnesses that he did that? Now, folks, this is very serious.

Because there are people in churches and every church has a chair of people who have other agendas. Whether it is because they don't like the pastor or because they are envious of his position and they want his position. Or whatever it is.

Whether they're just playing tools in the hands of the devil. Whatever the motive is. There's always somebody who has something to say about the leaders.

Now, leaders are not faultless. And if leaders sin, it is very, very serious. When that is proven, Paul says in the next verse, those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all.

That the rest may fear. So when an individual sins in the church, it's a private matter. When an elder sins, it's a public matter.

And if that sin is proven because witnesses have been brought, they have to be rebuked in public. Very serious. And so it tells us again about the seriousness of this ministry.

The tremendous responsibility that lies on brothers who take on this ministry. And of course the seriousness of bringing an accusation against such a brother. And if there is sin, it has to be dealt with.

Very severely. Very clearly. Because remember that we spoke about the fact that when, if the leaders set a standard.

Everyone else will lower that standard for themselves. Now I know it was a huge thing in South Africa. Not too many years ago when the pastor of the, probably I think is the biggest.

If not the biggest, one of the biggest charismatic churches in South Africa. A mega church. 6,000 people.

Divorced his wife and married a new one. A young one. His wife continued her ministry, he continued his ministry.

But what he was saying to his congregation. And I don't know how many people in that congregation. 6,000 people in the auditorium and it's full every Sunday.

So if there's 6,000 in the auditorium, there could be 12 or 20,000 members. Who knows. But what he was saying to every one of his members plus everybody else on the television.

Because he's on national television. Is if you don't like your wife anymore. You can get rid of her.

There was no sin. There was no immorality. She had not committed adultery neither.

Well, as far as we know. There was no accusation brought against her. He simply divorced her.

And so we have a responsibility. If it's okay for elders to sin, then it's okay for everybody else to sin. And so we have a standard to uphold.

But let's be careful that we don't find ourselves being hypercritical. Listening to rumors. Circulating rumors.

But if there is an accusation, it needs to be with witnesses. And it needs to be proven. All right.

Sinning elders. Teaching and ruling elders. While we're in this passage in 1 Timothy 5 and verse 17.

Sorry, I've been working backwards through this passage. But let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor. Especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Now, you'll see that he says, elders who rule well. Should be counted worthy of double honor. The word honor here has to do with money.

But then he says, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. So he speaks about elders who rule. Elders who rule well.

And elders who labor in the word and doctrine. Can you see that there are differences? And there are elders who rule. They just do their job.

But there are other elders who are really very good at their job. That doesn't mean the others are less of an elder. Remember, we spoke about the fact that we have different measures.

Some have one talent and others have two and others have five. Some elders are just good elders. But others are exceptional elders.

He's dealing with that. But then he says, there are those who labor in the word and in doctrine. So not all elders teach or preach.

So some elders simply rule. And we know the whole baggage about that word rule. Really meaning lead.

While others will teach or preach. Depending on their ministry. And so why this is important is because we have this tradition that those who are preaching elders are called pastors.

And those who are not preaching elders are called elders. But here, in fact, there is no difference. They just have a difference in function.

Some happen to specialize in preaching. But they would also rule. Others specialize in ruling.

But they may also sometimes teach. And so we have Brother Ramirez and Brother John who are essentially, primarily, it doesn't mean they don't preach. Brother Ramirez preaches from time to time.

But his main function is a ruling elder. And Brother John is primarily a leading or a ruling elder. I am also an elder.

But I am a teaching elder. That is my speciality. And as I said to you, when I was younger, for many, many years, I was not an elder.

I was a teacher, but not an elder. So not all teachers are elders. Many teachers cannot handle the responsibility and the burden and all of the stuff that comes with being a ruling elder.

Especially when they are younger. And it just bogs them down. It just distracts them from the Word.

And sometimes they have great difficulty in preaching in an unprejudiced way because they are prejudiced by all of the stuff that they know that is going on in the congregation. And so they start pointing people out and all of that sort of, those sorts of problems. So not all elders rule.

So not all teachers rule. But some teachers do. So you have differences.

And it doesn't mean that a preaching elder is more important than a ruling elder. They are both elders. And there are times when the one would function in his role because that's what's required at that time.

And then there are other times when the other one would function. And for myself, I need to work with other elders. I'm not particularly good at counseling.

I do my share of it. But that is not what I'm particularly good at. I need other people who are good at counseling to help with the counseling.

And so we need one another. All right. Let's talk about the ministry of elders.

Are we going for time? Yeah. Thanks. Let's go to the Book of Psalms and a special prize for anyone who can guess where we're going.

Psalm what? 119? I don't think so. 23. Psalm 23.

And I want you to see how and the things that the Lord does because he says, The Lord is my shepherd and Jesus says, I am that good shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. The first thing that elders need to do or shepherds need to do is supply the needs of the sheep.

I shall not want, meaning I will not need anything. Now, obviously, this is not meaning material things, but it's meaning spiritual things. One of the most important responsibilities of a natural shepherd is to make sure that the sheep are fed.

And one of the most important things the spiritual shepherds have is to make sure that the people are fed. The Word of God, obviously. Now, they don't necessarily, they don't themselves feed them all the time.

The shepherd doesn't feed himself to the sheep. The sheep don't eat the shepherd. The shepherd makes sure that the sheep get to the pastures where there is good food.

And so shepherds may not necessarily themselves teach, but they make sure that the people are exposed to good teaching. And if the church does not have teaching, then they make sure that they find somebody who can help or they make some kind of plan. And sometimes we have to use tapes and CDs and DVDs and those sorts of things.

But the bottom line is their responsibility is to make sure that the sheep are fed, that the needs of the sheep are supplied. And those needs are not just feeding and teaching, but counseling and comfort and advice, as we'll see. And so, I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. And when he speaks about green pastures, he is speaking about creating an environment of peace and of harmony.

Sheep are easily spooked. They easily get jittery and upset. And they easily run.

And they don't do well. Sheep don't multiply well when they are stressed. They don't get nice and fat when they are stressed.

And so they need to be led into green pastures. And they need to be in a peaceful environment. One of the most important functions of elders in the local church is to make sure that there is peace in the church.

Because, remember, the devil is about robbing and killing and destroying. And one of the things that he tries to do first is to rob and to destroy the peace that exists in the church. And so elders need to make sure that there is peace amongst God's people.

And there are often disputes. And there are often troublemakers. And there are all sorts of other issues that come.

There may be political upsets. There may be upheavals outside of the church that impact on the church. And the elder's responsibility is to make sure that the folk are set at peace, that they are led into green pastures.

The green pastures don't just speak about feeding but speaks about peace and about tranquility. He leads me beside still waters, which is really the same thing. Now, sheep cannot drink from rushing water.

And so what the shepherd would do if the water is flowing too fast is he will create a little canal in the mud. And he will build a little dam on the side of the river. Because if the sheep drink in the rushing river, they could fall into the river and be washed away and be killed that way.

And so again, making sure that the waters are peaceful, that the water is not muddied like the shepherds of Israel did in Ezekiel 34. All right. Verse 3. He restores my soul.

He restores my soul. And I believe that he is speaking here about emotional well-being. Not only does he make sure that we have the right teaching and that we have the right doctrine, but he makes sure that our souls are restored, that our issues are dealt with.

And people have many issues, particularly today. And elders help to counsel and to advise and to work through those issues and to act as a sounding board so that people's souls can be restored, that their relationships can be normalized with others and with the Lord. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Notice, he drives me into the paths of righteousness. No, he leads me. Shepherds never drive, they lead.

And the paths of righteousness speaks about holiness, upright living. And one of the most important responsibilities of elders is to encourage folk to lead them by example, to live godly lives, lives that honor God, lives that are righteous. Righteousness not just in our relationship with God, righteousness in our dealings and relationships with one another.

Righteousness in our dealings with the world. Righteousness in our dealings with the government and with the authorities. Righteousness in every area of our lives.

And so we need to lead into righteousness for his name's sake. Because remember, when we act unrighteously, his name is blasphemed. Verse 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

For you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Elders need to comfort. Elders need to be there in times of hardship and difficulty.

And most of the time people will never call on elders and their counsel except when they go through problems. Unfortunately, most of the time when I see people in my office, it's because they have problems or there are problems. Though I don't often have people coming in and saying, brother, you know, things are really just going well for me.

God has blessed me. Doesn't happen that often. But that's what elders or what shepherds are there for.

When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. And we live in a time when people fear many things. When men's hearts are failing them for fear.

The New Testament says that's the nature of the time in which we are living. There are all sorts of things. Terrorism, political instability, the price of oil going up, money losing its value, the stock market crashing.

All of these things are things that people fear. And he is there with us. And we need to be there with one another.

Verse 5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Now, this is not just feeding the folk, but feeding them in the presence of the enemies. Who's the enemy? The devil.

And the world and the flesh. These are the things that are the enemies of our souls. And so the good shepherds will make sure that folk are fed in a peaceful environment in the midst of a world that is stormy and filled with turmoil.

Making sure that even though the devil is out there and he's like a roaring lion. That folk are finding peace in their relationships with one another, in their relationship with the Lord. And they're able to grow spiritually in the midst of a turbulent world.

And in the midst of our enemies. You anoint my head with oil. This speaks of an abundance.

Not just making sure that people have enough, but that they have more than enough. Anointing the head with oil in this context doesn't speak about anointing like you anoint a king or a priest. But anointing the head with oil here speaks about abundance.

Speaks of richness. Those days if your face shone, then it was a sign of prosperity and of blessing. And so making sure that people are not just receiving their basic needs met spiritually and in every other way.

But that folk have an abundance of good things and of God's blessing in their lives. My cup runs over speaks about the same thing. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. I'm sad about people who don't dwell in the house of the Lord. Who are watching the Oscars tonight.

Or whatever. But we cannot legislate or penalize or shame or any of the other tools that we sometimes want to use to get people to dwell in the house of the Lord. But David says that the Lord my shepherd has created an environment where I don't want to be anywhere else.

And this is probably one of the greatest challenges for elders and for leaders is to create an environment in the house of the Lord that people say I'd rather be in the Lord's house tonight. Than be watching the Oscars. Or whatever.

Alright a few more things about elders. The functioning of elders. In the New Testament.

And I'm not going to go through each one of these references but in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 5. He is to take care of the church. He is to take care of the church. He must teach the word of God.

We've spoken about that. 1 Timothy 5 verse 17. He is to watch for the souls of those who are entrusted to him.

He should pray for the sick. We dealt with that in some detail some time ago from the book of Peter. Elders should warn and admonish those who are going astray.

James 5 verse 14. It's not always all the nice things. There are times when elders need to admonish.

Meaning they have to speak strongly. There are times when they have to rebuke. Unfortunately.

Elders should lead by example. We've spoken about that. They should watch for the souls.

Paul speaks about the fact that we submit ourselves to those who rule over you because they watch for your souls. As those who give an account. Sometimes I think that elders are more concerned.

I'm not saying in this church. But in general that elders are more concerned about watching the church as making sure that nothing goes wrong. And the context of someone who is watching over the church is not to watch to make sure everybody's doing the right thing and nothing's going wrong.

But more to watch for their souls. The responsibility of the shepherd as he looks out after over his sheep. The big thing he's watching for is for those who are going astray.

For those who are going to get attacked. And he's making sure that they are cared for. Watching for their spiritual welfare.

A tremendous responsibility. And for me as a shepherd it's one of the hardest things to see people backslide. And you watch it.

You can see it happen. When a sheep goes astray from the flock. You can see the sheep begins to graze a little bit over here.

And it's wandering off slowly but surely. Now the problem is how do you get him to turn around? A sheep is easy because you go and you chase him back. If your brother know you whack him.

But the problem is that people don't want to be told what to do. Nobody wants to hear brother you're going astray. And yet everybody knows it.

And the elders who are doing their job can see it. And that's the hardest thing. Because when somebody is busy going astray.

There's not much we can do but pray. But we need to be watching. And when the opportunity presents itself to say brother.

I'm concerned. I'm noticing something in your life. That is telling me that you're not where you should be.

Very, very serious thing. The problem is that today folk do not submit to elders. So the moment you do that.

What's the response? Well tough brother. Here's my resignation. I'm going.

To the street down there. To the road. To the church down the street.

That's the reaction. Very, very sad. And so he says that we need to submit ourselves to those who have the rule over us.

Because they are watching for ourselves as those who have to give an account. Elders need to remember. This is one of the scariest things about the ministry.

And I do not do my job without a tremendous amount of fear. Because I know that one day I will stand before the great shepherd. And he's going to come with a church role.

Of every individual who has ever been in every one of the churches that I have preached in. And he's going to say what about that brother? What about that sister? They went astray and they ended up in hell. Did you do your job? We have to give an account.

And that's why I'm appealing to those who are not elders. And that's why he says, the writer says, submit yourselves to them. Because they have to give an account.

Don't make their lives hard. And you know the way that you make life hard for an elder is by just doing your own thing. And not listening to his advice.

Because he can do nothing when you don't want to listen to his advice. And yet he knows he's going to have to give an account on that day. For every single individual.

I never preach the word of God without fear. Because I know that every word that I speak, I will have to give an account for. And so there are a number of admonitions and we're running out of time.

So I'm going to go through these very quickly. In the New Testament to elders. The first is that elders must take heed to themselves.

Paul speaking to the elders of Ephesus, he said, take heed to yourselves and to the flock. Elders' first responsibility is to make sure that they are right in their relationship with God. Sometimes elders are so involved in shepherding the sheep that they themselves go astray.

And end up far from God and end up falling into sin. And so elders' first responsibility is to care for themselves. Second, elders are not to neglect their duties of the sheep as Israel did.

But to be diligent in the exercise of their duties. Elders are to be diligent, not to be slothful. Many times you find elders, many, many churches, probably the vast majority of churches in the world today.

Elders are just names on the church bulletin or whatever. And that's all they do. They attend a council meeting once a month or whenever they have a council meeting, that's all it is.

That's not doing the work of an elder. That's not fulfilling the responsibility. So elders are not to neglect their responsibilities.

And then we've seen and we've dealt with this whole issue of authority. Elders are not to become lords over God's heritage. They are not to become masters.

They are not to drive the sheep. They are not to make decisions that affect everybody else without taking into consideration all of the facts. So that's a little bit about elders.

It's easy to talk about it. It's very hard to do. It's very hard to be a good elder.

And it's very hard to be a good sheep. Amen. Actually, yeah.

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