

## The Ministry of Elders

1). Too often today Leadership within the church sees itself as a board of directors managing a corporate company. Many times men will be given a leadership position within the church because of their business expertise and their financial skills.

- They become salesmen in the Christian marketplace selling their particular product in competition with all the others products that are out there.
  - ...How many programs do we run, how many ministries do we have?
  - ...What can be done to get you in the building and keep you here?
- Needless to say, none of this is scriptural, nor will it be a part of the ministry of Elders in this congregation.

2). It is true that Cornerstone Christian Fellowship is a registered corporation with officers appointed within the corporation. But the corporation is not the church.

- Rather, this is the way that the law within secular society understands our existence.
- We can see this in the words of Jesus -

**Matthew 22:21b....."Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."**

- The church is made up of Christians, the body of Christ. The church is not a building or an institution. The church is to be taken care of according to the instruction of scripture.

3). If we want to find the Biblical model for Leadership within the church we need only go to the scriptures.

**Titus 1:5 ¶ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you--**

- We see the elders were appointed in every city – by command—to set in order that which was lacking.
- We know that God is not the author of confusion and that all things must be done decently and in order. The fact that God operates in an ordered way is the evidence of scripture –

**1Corinthians 11:3** *But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

4). Elders within the church come from two sources. There are those such as we see in Crete who are appointed to the role... and those who are Elders by nature of the gifting

**Ephesians 4:11** *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,*

- This is what we see at the beginning of 2 John and 3 John – John, the Apostle, calls himself ‘the Elder’
- And again we see this in 1 Peter –

**1Peter 5:1** ¶ *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*

- Here we see Apostles, who by nature of their calling are Elders, and are fellow elders with those who are appointed to that office.
- Here is our model.
- And you will notice the instruction given to Elders in verse 2 – ‘shepherd the flock’ – this is the role of the Elder which we shall look at more closely in a moment.
- Notice that no one is to be compelled to be an Elder. It is not to be done for dishonest gain, and Elders are not to lord it over those entrusted to them. There are two things here:
  - A congregation is entrusted by God to Elders who are to shepherd the people in their care.
  - Elders are not to be lords over those entrusted to them –

**Matthew 20:25** *But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.*

- Lording it over abuses personal power – ‘I’m the Elder, you’re not, do as I say’
- Exercising authority abuses personal position – ‘God appointed me to this role, you had better know who is in charge’
- Of necessity, decision-making must take place. And, the responsibility for decisions that impact the flock rests with the shepherds. And the best example of how this works is seen in Acts with the dispute between Paul and Barnabus and ‘certain men.’

**Acts 15:13** *And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me:*

- We won’t look at the whole passage here – but we can see the principle – having heard all that had been said, James, an Elder in the Church at Jerusalem, made a decision that was accepted and binding on all.
- And such is the way the Eldership at Cornerstone Florida has conducted itself and how the Eldership here will conduct itself.
- We will listen to all and everything and will seek advice and opinions from everyone. But in the end, there will be no congregational vote. There will be a decision made by the Elders– for which the Elders will be responsible before God.
  - Herein is safety for the church...and protection for the flock.
- And notice that all of this is with a view to the appearing of ‘the Great Shepherd’

**5).** Let us now look more closely at the role of the shepherd from Scripture-

**Acts 20:17** ¶ *From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.....25 "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. 26 "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.*

*28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

- Note that Paul states *he preached the kingdom of God.*
- In verse 26 he makes an extraordinary statement – ‘I am innocent of the blood of all men’ – because he declared the whole counsel of God.

- He then commands his fellow elders to take heed to themselves and the flock in respect of the same thing.

6). Why would Paul say he is “innocent of the blood of all men”? And what would this have to do with the role of an Elder? To find the answer we need to go back into the OT—

**Ezekiel 3:17** *"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: 18 "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 "Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. 20 "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. 21 "Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul."*

- Notice that it is the watchman’s responsibility to sound the warning to people of God. *Whether they listen or not is not his responsibility.*
- If the watchman does not sound the warning and the child of God dies in his sin, the watchman’s blood will be required by God...not the one in his care.
- If the watchman does sound the warning and the child of God does not listen and then dies in his sin, the watchman is innocent---and he is seen as delivering his own soul.
- If the watchman warns the child of God, and the child of God does not sin, both live, i.e. their souls are delivered.
- It does not get much clearer than this, does it?

This is also what we see in **James 5:19** *Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*

7). Remember that wickedness / iniquity and being “cut off” are in relation to the inheritance –

**Psalm 37:34** ¶ *Wait on the LORD, And keep His way, And He shall exalt you to inherit the land; When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.*

**1Corinthians 6:9 ¶ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.**

**8).** If the relationship between the watchmen/elders and those entrusted to their care is correctly understood scripturally, (in respect of their ministry and their faithfulness to that ministry) the result should be one of joy.

- **Isaiah 52:7 ¶ How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" 8 Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, With their voices they shall sing together; For they shall see eye to eye When the LORD brings back Zion. 9 Break forth into joy, sing together, You waste places of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.**
- **1Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?**

**9).** Sadly though, it is possible for Elders to be unfaithful in their task. We witness this in respect of Israel. –

**Isaiah 56:10 His watchmen are blind, They are all ignorant; They are all dumb dogs, They cannot bark; Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. 11 Yes, they are greedy dogs Which never have enough. And they are shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every one for his own gain, From his own territory. 12 "Come," one says, "I will bring wine, And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; Tomorrow will be as today, And much more abundant."**

- This is exactly what Paul speaks of to the Elders of the church at Ephesus—

**Acts 20:29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.**

- Notice that Paul says that from among themselves men will rise up. *This means that among the church men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after themselves.*

10). It is also possible for those of the flock to ignore the words of their shepherds –

**Jeremiah 6:16** *Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' 17 Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.'*

**2Corinthian 4:3** *But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*

11). Remember the wise and foolish virgins...the faithful/unfaithful servant ...Ruth and Orpah? Not only MUST the whole counsel of God be preached (grace AND the kingdom which is to come) but somebody also needs to listen and act upon it.

12). **Colossians 1:21** *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight-- 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. 24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, 26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. 27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. 29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.*

- That stated here by Paul is exactly that which defines the ministry of Elders and is precisely what you will find here.

- This is that which we find in **Acts 6:4** "*but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*"

**13).** Remember that the purpose of the Eldership ministry is to warn and teach...with a view to presenting the flock 'perfect' at the Judgment Seat. This is no small and insignificant matter because of the outcome.

- **Hebrew 13:17** *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

- This is part of the warning and the teaching we have covered. So if we as Elders, or you as those entrusted to our care, ignore this, it will be at our peril.
- So please, as we have just seen the ordination of Elders in our church, let us choose to lay aside our old experiences,

and let us trust in the faithfulness of God,

and align ourselves with the truth of scripture.