

## 5th. Duties of ruling elders in relation to the pastor and to the church

Discussion on 6-6-10

### 1A. General statement of principles that apply (mindset)

Ruling elders are to exercise care for the flock by the word and prayer in a way analogous to the care exercised by the preaching elder. The job of the apostles is the ministry of preaching and prayer (Acts 6). That applies to the pastor-teacher today who continues the apostolic task in the post-apostolic time-between by adherence to the text of Scripture.

Primary in this rule is the oversight of the spiritual well-being of a local flock (and by extension to the people of God in general). Thus, discipleship is central for ruling elders and for the flock; they are to promote growth in the word through prayerful support of pastoral preaching and teaching (note how Acts 20 stresses the avoidance of twisted words and therefore positive discipleship-learning). A prospective elder ought to have this discipleship concern in his heart.

Thus, without formally preaching or teaching, ruling elders are to teach the word by life and conversation. Accordingly, they are to learn from the pastor, interact with him for mutual learning on a regular basis whether formally or informally, help him lead and steer a straight path in the ministry of the word. They have a supportive role regarding the preaching of the word and this does not remove the parity of elders in matters of vote for good order in leadership. However, their supportive role accents the primacy of preaching by accenting the role of the pastor-teacher.

An elder commits himself to the risen Lord for discipleship indeed and in deeds. It is a particular expression and application of his baptismal pledge to serve Christ and His church; the making of this eldership pledge depends on the man's maturity (he is not to be a novice) and the appointment of the Spirit through the means of examination of the qualifications by the individual and by the church, vote, and covenant. Many factors come into play in this process such as willingness, clarity of conscience, timing, need, and so forth. Accordingly, it is not the case that all mature and godly spiritual leaders necessarily become elders.

### 2A. Bullet points of application for ruling elders (actions)

- 1) Attend regular men's meetings
- 2) Public prayer in the assembly (both ad hoc and per the pastor's request)
- 3) Reading of Scripture in the assembly
- 4) Participate in the Sunday Bible study (to balance discussion and to evaluate the overall diet)
- 5) Meet with the pastor as need may dictate for study of the word (for the flock and mission)
- 6) Assess fulfillment of our mission
  - Such as ETS, conferences, presbytery & use of the web site
  - (attending presbytery is not required but welcomed)
- 7) Consult with the pastor on the diet of the word for the flock
  - Review of the Sunday Bible study; evaluation & planning
  - Review of preaching; evaluation & planning (includes communion)
  - Focus on the needs and prayer for God's blessing on the lambs of Christ
- 8) Contribute to the agenda for the men's meetings & family meetings
- 9) Assist in the process of nomination of office holders and policy changes for church vote
- 10) Work with the pastor and heads of households on a constitution (& changes) for church vote
- 11) Meet with the pastor in matters of church discipline
- 12) Initiate these things prayerfully by covenant with the church
- 13) Fulfillment of this role takes shape according to each elder's knowledge, disposition & gifts

### 3A. Summary of application for the flock

The church expresses its willingness to follow the eldership along these lines prayerfully: to pray for the elders with these things in mind and to cooperate with the elders in the imple-

mentation of their duties. This cooperation extends to the items in the lists of qualifications for elders. For example, elders are to extend hospitality (to “welcome” and work toward the removal of strangeness) and teach by example and conversation. Therefore, a positive assessment of a man for eldership, vote for him, and covenant with him, means that you will display a cooperative spirit in receiving hospitality and instruction from him by his example and conversation. Covenant with the elders involves a learning curve as all grow in understanding of the spirit and intent of the mindset and actions of eldership rule along with the spirit and intent of the qualification lists.

What would be different in your relationship to the elders subsequent to their ordination?

There will be little practical change then from how you relate to these men now. The principles and applications bear on all Christian to Christian relationships, but a serious commitment by covenant (elders to you and you to the elders) sets the relationship of elder to flock apart before the Lord. What does this do? It orders, clarifies, and formalizes your relationship to the spiritual leaders of the church. It goes hand in hand with membership in which members commit themselves to the care of particular elders that they own as “their” leaders (Heb 13.17: Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you).

A significant matter with weighty practical bearing is how submission to elders works out in church discipline. Briefly put, the stages of discipline lead ultimately to the church in terms of her rulers who act as judges. By covenant, the church entrusts this judicial function to the elders and agrees to abide by their decisions. If by due process (with much charity and reasonableness), the eldership decides in favor of excommunication, the church agrees to abide by that decision (note: justice and fairness is served by a presbyterian form of government in which an excommunicated member has the right to appeal to presbytery, and beyond that to the general assembly).

How would things change in the men’s meetings if we have some who are elders and some not?

There would be no change of significance. If there are decisions that the elders must make, that would normally include consensus building with all the men. Some matters, such as church discipline, would require the elders to meet at a separate time, even here, consultation with the men of the church would be sought to the limits of charity and privacy.

4A. Bullets on the need for plurality (since the change due to plurality is minimal)

...biblical order...enable membership in CREC...extend visibility and witness of WRC encouragement for the pastor by means of a presbytery in a way similar to ETS only more biblical and much better...participate in a presbyterian judicial (court-like) system for justice and fairness in matters of church discipline...