

5th Eldership Authority in the Church and Churches

Qualifications (for discussion: 4-11-2010)

Introduction

Having discussed the authority relationship of wives to husbands, we now take up the authority relationship of flock to elders with particular focus for us at WRC on the need of plurality and how that need may be attained. We begin with qualifications for this office and some implications that flow from them.

1A. Major texts on qualifications (later: implications from these qualifications)

1B. 1 Pet 5.1-5

This is a good place to start because of the overlap of mutuality with the husband's authority, especially with respect to the claim that mutual submission is the practical equivalent of humility.

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Notably the call to submission to elders (v. 5; "subject" is the strong word for submit to authority) has a principle of mutuality built into it because all (all in the church including elders) are to clothe themselves **with humility toward one another** enforced by warning and promise: **God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble**. Perhaps, we might say that it is a point of emphasis for elders to avoid pride because they have authority to which others humbly submit.

The duty of elders is to shepherd the flock exercising oversight. Shepherding conveys two basic ideas: feeding and protecting. With the additional **exercising oversight**, we get an emphasis on watching over and taking care of the flock. Hence, the idea is elder-care in bond with pastoral care. In this connection, Peter states some qualifications.

1) There must be willingness

The point is made twice since "eagerly" is a synonymous word for willingly. The contrasts draw out the point of willingness: **not under compulsion** and **not for shameful gain**. Thus, a) It should not be something into which one is manipulated. b) The willingness should be without regard for the money to be gained (money represents all earthly things including ego building). This is primarily a reference to greed; it is shameful greed in at least two ways. On one hand, love of money is the root of other evils including idolatry in which God is not loved above all else. On the other hand, it is particularly shameful to "serve God and His people" for what you can get out of it (money, flattery, etc.). Most elders serve for no pay and those who are paid need to keep their focus first on God waiting for His provision as He sees fit to give it through His people.

Some of these qualifications speak to the heart; here, one should have no reservations of conscience about being a spiritual leader. For example, one ought not to think that the time spent in this work has little or no income attached to it so it is not very valuable. The church has limited access to the heart, but words and conduct may reveal compulsion and gain as someone's driving forces. Q: Why is it important to note what the church has access to? [**Fundamentally, this is important because it helps us focus the idea that the qualifications for this office are in the hands of the church; elders do not appoint new elders; it is the decision of the church in which elders help by screening and nominating etc. Also, knowing the limits of access helps the church perform its role with charity.**]

2) There must be humble exemplification

An elder must display the opposite of a domineering rule, which is being autocratic, dictatorial, oppressive, harsh, and bossy (cf. using a rod of iron or lording it over). Instead, they are to lead by example as in devote praying and godly conversation. 2

Qs for discussion:

1) Are these qualifications any different than the qualifications for godly Christian men?

[No, not essentially; the men are to be godly and these qualifications guide all men to godliness; note how this is not an academic thing, but a matter of Christian living]

2) What can we learn from the answer to Q1?

[We learn that we ought not to overstate the difference between elders and flock; elders are to display maturity in faith and life but they are not more holy, say, as celebrate priests that must be more holy than the average married man who cannot get beyond the taint of marital sex. We do not seek here to lower the standard for eldership, but we must be realistic; elders are sinners; as married couple are two sinners, so elders and flock are sinners. Thus, the qualifications need qualification; for example, blameless is not sanctified holy or perfectly without blame.]