

Chapter Six

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR ELDERS AND THE PASTOR

In previous studies we have seen that the spiritual leadership of a local church is in the hands of a body of men called either elders (“presbuteros”) or overseers (“episkopos”). This includes any that may have a gift-ministry of Ephesians 4:11.

It was pointed out that co-equal authority has not proven to be effective, and Scripture does not necessarily support it. Certainly in the Old Testament God raised up a single man to be a leader for His people. In the New Testament we see individual leaders taking the initiative: Peter, Paul, James, Timothy, Titus and others. Within the eldership of the local church the presiding elder is the one we call the pastor.

It is imperative that this body of elders, sometimes called a presbytery, work well together. There will be problems when the pastor and elders do not understand their responsibilities and their limits. Here are four obvious problems:

The pastor dominates the other elders.

The pastor doesn't take leadership.

The elders dictate to the pastor.

The elders are passive, neglecting their responsibilities and not participating in decision making.

A. The Pastor and the Elders Together

1. They should rule (“to stand before” or “to lead”), (Heb. 13:7; I Tim. 5:17).

2. They should pray and seek God’s will (Acts 13:1-3; 6:4).

3. They should communicate openly with one another. Elders should not feed inhibited. Pastors should welcome opinions, etc. (Acts 15:1-3).

4. They should share the oversight of the flock; its growth, any problems, any backsliding, any spiritual lack in teaching, etc. (I Pet. 5:1-4; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17; Gal. 6:1; Titus 1:9).

5. They should be ready to counsel and teach (I Tim 3:2; II Tim. 2:2).

6. They should judge spiritual utterances (I Cor. 14:29; I Thes. 5:19-21).

7. They should make financial decisions. Deacons and other church members can handle money, but expenditures are the elders’ responsibility (Acts 4:34-37; 11:29, 30).

8. They should discipline erring members (I Cor. 5 and 6).

9. They should recognize and set in fellow elders as needed (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; I Tim 4:14).

B. The Responsibilities Primarily of the Pastor

The pastor, being the presiding elder, should be the initiator and prime motivator of the church, therefore:

1. He is responsible for the “vision” of the church, i.e. the direction the church should go, its outreach, both local and foreign. He leads the flock in and out. Compare Numbers 27:16-21; II Samuel 5:2; and Psalm 23.

2. He is responsible for the overall direction of the services when he is present.

3. He leads the presbytery meeting (Rom. 12:8, “He who leads...with diligence”).

4. He is responsible, ultimately, for the spiritual state of the flock. See Revelation 2 and 3 where the “angel” of the church is addressed concerning the spiritual condition of the church.

5. He sets the spiritual tone of the church.

6. He oversees the spiritual diet of the flock (II Pet. 1:12; Acts 20:20, 27).

7. He helps everyone find his place in the body and in ministry (Eph. 4:11-14; I Pet. 4:10, 11).

C. Matters Relative to the Congregation

1. The congregation should have ample opportunity to offer suggestions, to present needs, etc. (Acts 6:1-5; 11:29; I Cor. 1:11; 7:1). It is generally recognized that leaders are unwise who do not consider the opinions and desires of the believers (Eph. 5:21).

2. Some decisions that pertain to the convenience or desires of the people can be decided on by a congregational vote. For example, the time of meetings and the location of church outings. Projects that depend on the involvement of the entire congregation, such as a major church building program or opening a Christian school, should be brought to the congregation for general approval, though not for a vote. Such projects should not be sprung on the people. Much prayer should precede any open meeting. A congregational meeting can be helpful to see the feelings of the people, but the final decision should not be made by the congregation.

3. Deacons can be selected by the congregation (Acts 6:3-6). They are to be approved by the eldership.

4. Note the presence and the approval of the “brethren” in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

D. Guidelines for the Presbytery

1. Elders Rule:

There are two Greek words translated “rule” in the K. J. Bible.

a. “Proistemi” (I Tim. 5:17; Rom. 12:8; I Thes. 5:12) “to stand before”, “to preside” (Strong). According to A GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON by Green, Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London, it also means “to set over”, “to appoint with authority.” The idea is that the authority of the elders is a delegated authority. Certainly it is not a dominating rulership against which Jesus warned His disciples (Mark 10:42-45; Matt. 23:8-12).

b. “Hegeomai” (Heb. 13:7,17,24) “to lead.” Elders are to take the initiative in guiding the people.

Another Greek word for ruler, “archon,” which carries the idea of “first” or “chief,” is not used for the church leader. (Luke 8:41; Acts 7:27, 35)

2. Decision Making:

a. For business meetings prepare agendas and write minutes.

b. Make **plans** and set **goals** (Luke 14:28-32; Proverbs 20:18) This is not contrary to “being led by the Spirit.” Presbytery planning for the future permits church members to plan.

c. Presbytery meetings should not be conducted in a rigid, formal manner. Avoid taking votes. It accentuates the division of opinion. On the other hand, all opinions should be expressed. Decisions should be based on a consensus.

d. Unanimity should be sought (Phil. 2:1; Acts 15:19, 22, 25 with context). Where there is a clear divergence of opinion many matters can be tabled and prayer made until the Spirit brings a unity of opinion. There can be, however, unanimity without 100% agreement on all details. Unanimity means that all are agreed to support **the consensus** without complaining or reluctance.

e. The pastor is the leader and the initiative for the church program and the implementation of the decisions are his.

3. Financial Decisions:

a. Church money is God's money. Elders will be held accountable for handling His money. Stewards must be faithful (I Cor. 4:2).

b. Money controls. Those who control money can easily succumb to the lust of controlling and seek to manipulate with it. For this reason spiritual-minded men (elders) must control the finances of the church.

c. Wise planning dictates the need of budgeting so that no department of the church is neglected.

d. Elders not on salary should set the pastor's salary. In order to avoid criticism and the temptation to extravagance, the pastor should not set his own salary. The pastor who does so may be tempted either to give himself too much or he may through modesty give himself too little. On the other hand, elders should be sensitive to their pastor's needs and not put him in the embarrassing position of having to ask for a raise. An indication for an appropriate salary is the average salary of those attending the church. It is normal also that the larger the congregation, the larger the salary. Excessively high salaries, however, can become a source of temptation and a point of carnal pride.

4. Discipline:

a. Disciplining should never be the decision of one man alone. It should be done by the entire presbytery and supported by the church (Matt. 18:15-17). Paul was the one initiating disciplinary action in 1 Corinthians 5, but in verse 13 he tells them that the church should take action. We see this done in II Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:6-12.

b. The following scriptures should be studied as a guide for the corrective action to be taken, according to the type of error or sin:

Divisive men (Titus 3:10, 11; Rom. 16:17).

Unsubmissive men (I Tim 6:3-5; II Thess 3:14, 15).

Those in false doctrine (II John 9-11; Titus 1:10-14).

Those in deliberate moral sin (I Cor. Sand I Tim. 1:19, 20; Matt. 18:15-17).

Leaders who sin (III John 9, 10; I Tim 5:19, 20).