

Elders and Preachers Working Together

Introduction: The relationship of shepherds and preachers has a significant impact and influence on the wellbeing of a local congregation. The trajectory, orientation, direction, work, mission, commitment, and devotion of a local church can never be fully realized without godly leadership and Biblical teaching and preaching of God's word!

There are gospel preachers who move from one church to another church because of friction with elders. There are men that have stopped preaching full-time because of bad experiences with elders. There are congregations that have been crippled and harmed because of alienation between preachers and elders.

On the other hand, when shepherds and preachers work together harmoniously it is a beautiful blessing among God's people. While elders and preachers have a different work, we are brothers in Christ and fellow-laborers in the kingdom!

I. Biblical Pattern for Shepherds and Preachers

a. Biblical Distinction Between the Work of Elders and Evangelists

- i. We are all familiar with the misconception of many that all preachers are pastors.
- ii. Our first pair of terms: Elder/Presbyter: *The Greek word means "an older man."*
 1. The word is translated "elders" in Acts 20:17.
 2. It carries the idea of those who through knowledge of the Scriptures and the wisdom of experience are well respected.
 3. A form of the word is also found in 1 Timothy 4:14, where it is translated "eldership" or "presbytery."
 4. This refers to the group of experienced men who lead the church.
 5. In all cases in the New Testament, autonomous local churches are always led by a plurality of elders, never by one man (Acts 14:23).
- iii. Our second pair of terms: Shepherd/Pastor: *The word means "a shepherd" "one who tends or feeds a flock."*
 1. It is found in Acts 20:28. Some translations use the phrase "to feed" instead of "shepherd."
 2. A form of the word is found in 1 Peter 5:2 where it is translated "shepherd."
 3. The word is translated "pastors" in Ephesians 4:11 and describes those who are responsible for feeding the flock.
 4. While a preacher may qualify and be appointed as a pastor, merely because one is a preacher does not mean he is a pastor (I Peter 5:1).
 5. Nor are deacons – elders, as is evident by the fact that the two offices are distinguished by Paul (I Timothy 3:1-7; Philippians 1:1).

- iv. Our third pair of terms – Bishop/Overseer: The word means “*one who oversees or superintends.*”
 - 1. It is found in Act 20:28 where it is translated “overseers.” These men have charge of—that is, they oversee—the local church and will give account to God for the souls under their charge, Hebrews 13:17.
 - 2. It is translated “bishop” in 1 Timothy 3:1. There, Paul gave the qualifications for the office.
- v. How do we know these words apply to one office?
 - 1. Because these terms are used interchangeably by inspired writers.
 - 2. Note that Paul called for the elders of the church in Acts 20:17.
 - 3. When they came to him, he called them overseers and shepherds in Acts 20:28.
 - 4. It is obviously the same office to which he refers.
 - 5. The distinctive terms simply reference varying aspects of the same work.
- b. Distinction in the work of elders and preachers.
 - i. The Bible teaches that there is a clear distinction between the roles of shepherds and preachers within the body of Christ.
 - ii. In Ephesians 4:11 we read, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophet, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers...”
 - iii. The apostle outlines the qualities of those who are to serve as bishops (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9).
 - iv. These brothers are to oversee the flock of God as stewards of the Lord (Tit. 1:7; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
 - v. Both elders and preachers share the responsibility to teach and encourage their brethren in Christ.

II. Five things Every Elder/Preacher Relationship Needs:

a. Mutual respect (Rom. 12:10)

- i. If elders refuse to consider the preacher’s ideas, there is a lack of respect and resentment can set in...
- ii. If the preacher refuses to submit to the elders simply because they disagreed in an area of opinion, then there is a lack of respect.

b. Regular, Open Communication

- i. Open communication means that everyone's comfortable enough to say what he really thinks, without fear of retribution.
- ii. Again, if there is a lack of respect present, then open communication cannot happen in either direction.

c. Encouragement

- i. There needs to be a unified effort to encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11).
- ii. Take the time to send a quick email, text message, or other communication to encourage each other.

d. Prayer

- i. No relationship is going to be built to last without prayer.
- ii. Pray together, pray for each other, and pray for each other's relationships in the congregation (1 Thess. 5:17).
- iii. Just pray!

e. Annual Evaluations

- i. We must continue to grow as preachers and these types of meetings are helpful.
- ii. There can also be guidance regarding vital issues to address.
- iii. This can also be a time when a preacher can share concerns.
- iv. No one is above error, so we must understand that this need to be a two-way street of honest communication.

III. Five Things Every Elder/Preacher Relationship Must Avoid

- a. Micromanagement – “Top Down” – No consideration of others.
- b. Transferring shepherding responsibilities to the preacher.
- c. Passive Aggressive manipulation - “Keep him poor and humble”
- d. Distorted view of his work: “Serving Tables” – he is not too good to be involved in various activities but is that our view of His purpose as a gospel preacher? [Do a lot things as a Christian that may not be the specific work of a gospel preacher].
- e. Underestimate the value of the preaching of God's word (“Not a real job,” “keep it on the third grade level,” etc.).

IV. Issues That Contribute to Poor Relationships Between Elders and Preachers.

- a. Wrong view of themselves:
 - i. Elders who see themselves as CEO's of a congregation and employers of a preacher (Power structure, rather than family).
 - ii. Preachers do not see their work and labor in the Kingdom as "just a job."
 - iii. "You don't have a real job" – we have more than a job – we have kingdom work.
 - iv. Financial support of a preacher is described as "fellowship" (Phil. 1:5; 4:15), "harvest" (1 Cor. 9:9-12), "fruit," and "gift" (Phil. 4:16-17), and "giving and receiving" (Phil. 4:15).
- b. Refusal to Learn: The recognition that the preacher is responsible to preach to elders as much as he is to the rest of the congregation.
- c. Elders who fail to see their need to be servant-leaders.
- d. Elders that are hyper-critical of a preacher, or a preacher who is hyper-critical of the elders before others.
- e. The preacher who forms a clique with influential members of the local church that is constantly undermining the shepherds (There will be brethren who attempt to pull preachers into this) (1 Tim. 5:19-21).
- f. Elders that do not include the preacher in conversations of significant importance regarding problems in the congregation.
- g. Elders who are not engaged as leaders and expect the preacher to do their work.
- h. Elders who have an unscriptural view of the work of preachers.
- i. Preachers who rarely communicate with the elders.
- j. Elders and preachers who do not visit personally about the work of the Lord.
- k. Elders or preachers who show little concern for one another's families.
- l. Preachers are the only ones to publicly address the congregation.

V. What Positively Contributes to the Relationship Between Elders and Preachers

- a. Communication: If shepherds and preachers do not communicate – how are the shepherds going to feed the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3).
 - i. Relationship which can express concerns in a healthy way.
 - ii. Communication enables preachers to help and support the shepherds and the overall work of the church.

- iii. There are times when it's time to preach on sensitive issues, but there are times when preachers should preach on other things – issues elders dealing with.
- iv. Bible Study/mutual growth and teaching
- v. Prayer together
- vi. Every member (including individual elders submit first to Christ and then to the eldership)
 - 1. Maverick elder or preacher doing or saying whatever hits their mind in a moment when it has not been discussed is undermining of God's purpose for a congregation.
 - 2. Shepherds need to be aware of human patterns of behavior and the tendency of some to attempt to either isolate one elder from other elders or the preacher and the elders
 - 3. Elders need to be careful about triangulation (parents and kids,).

VI. Elders' Expectations for Preachers

a. Should have Scriptural expectations of the work of a preacher.

- i. The preacher is not to be a Social/media/hospitality/recreational/youth director
- ii. Need to be shaped by what the Bible says

b. To effectively preach the gospel he must be a faithful disciple (Matt. 22:37-40; cf. 16:24)

- i. True brother in Christ (Phil. 2:25-30)
- ii. Devoted husband and father (Eph. 5:22-33)
- iii. Serious about his own spiritual growth in Christ (2 Pet. 3:18)
- iv. Balancing boldness with humility (2 Tim. 2:24-26)

c. Preaches the word whenever the opportunity arises (2 Tim. 4:2-4)

- i. Labors to edify brethren in equipping the congregation through teaching to serve God at a high level (Eph. 4:11-16)
- ii. Absolutely committed to the power of the Biblical text (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- iii. Plans to work with the elders in the feeding of the flock (1 Tim. 4:6, 15-16).
- iv. Balanced life leads to balanced preaching (1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:4).
- v. Preaches the truth in love and patience (Eph. 4:15).
- vi. Preach in season and out of season – will he teach truth in controversy even at personal cost (Acts 20:27; 1 Tim. 6:12; Tim. 4:2)

- d. Strives to build healthy relationships with shepherds: Spend time praying, studying, discussing (1 Thess. 5:12-13).
- e. Build Relationships with brethren in Christ (Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:22)
- f. Faithful example as a Christian (1 Tim. 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22)

VII. Preachers' Expectations for Elders

- a. Expect to be shepherded by elders as part of the congregation rather than a disconnected contract laborer (1 Cor. 12:12-27).
- b. Expect communication with and support of teaching that is done on vital moral and doctrinal issues ("We will be behind you") (Acts 20:28; Tit. 1:9-11).
- c. Expect to have shepherds who are knowledgeable and courageous enough to correct me, were I to depart from the truth (1 Cor. 9:24-27; 10:12).
- d. Expect leaders who will have the courage to deal with difficult personalities – do not turn a blind eye to divisive attitudes (Rom. 16:17).
- e. Expect elders to have a Biblical perspective of accountability and transparency (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6).
- f. Not figure heads, but active in the edification and feeding of the congregation (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-16).
- g. Elders and preachers both must show patience toward one another because we are all striving to walk by faith as we our growing in God's grace!

VIII. What About a Preacher Serving as an Elder?

- a. **Scriptural (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).**
- b. **Benefits**
 - i. It is a blessing for congregations to appoint qualified men to serve as elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).
 - ii. Refined knowledge of God's word (2 Tim. 2:15).
 - iii. Experience base and awareness of doctrinal issues confronting brethren.
 - iv. Congregation should know about his beliefs and understanding of the scriptures from his teaching.
 - v. Close relationship with faithful elders and experience with past congregational problems [Benefitted in untold ways through his unique relationship with faithful elders].
 - vi. Responsibility as an elder will benefit his perspective as a preacher

c. Challenges

- i. Relationship with some members may change
- ii. Change the dynamic of interactions with other elders
- iii. Defending the elders becomes more difficult
- iv. “Two elders and one is the preacher” (pay and stay, working out differences, what if you leave for another work?)
- v. Brings out dysfunctional attitudes that may be present
 1. Micromanaging view toward a preacher
 2. Corporate model of employer-employee
 3. Condescension toward him as a preacher
 4. Exposes wrong views of the work of elders (“Too much power”)
- vi. Often problems with preachers who are serving as elders are not because of them having been preachers, but not having the qualities of godly leaders.