

Church Leadership-Elders (ACTS 20:17-33)

Growth is a wonderful thing but with it comes great challenges. We discussed this last week how the church faced challenges in the first century, but these challenges were great opportunities for them to continue growing in their faith. New ministry were being developed and ministry leaders put in place to serve in those ministries. ***In most churches today, you hear the word elders when referring to the leadership of the church.*** A lot of people may not have a clear understanding of who these people are.

The church began at the preaching of the apostles and as time progressed you will also hear the word elders for those in the leadership of the church.

The church in Jerusalem had elders. From Syria (Antioch) Paul and Barnabas took an offering to the elders in Judea. **Acts 11:29-30**

When Paul began to plant churches, he would train and appoint elders and then go to the next location and do the same. **Acts 14:21-23**

In the church planting method, the preacher or evangelist would appoint the elders. Paul told Titus to appoint elders in the church in Crete and gave him a list of qualifications for such leaders. (***Titus 1:5-10***)

Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders to discuss a theological issue. **Acts 15:2**

Who were these elders and what did they exactly do?

Acts 20:17-33

In this text there are three words to define the same group of people and the meanings of these words would give us a better understanding of who these leaders were and what they did.

Paul sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus. (v.17) The word **elder** here is ***presbuteros*** (elder, older, experienced).

The Jewish community always had elders and they were the most experienced and wise who led the community in legal matters. (the elders of the city or at the gate: ***Prov.31:23; Ruth 4:2, Lam.5:14***).

The other two words to refer to elders are found in verse 28

Be on your guard for yourselves and the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you Overseers. Episkopos (guardian, overseer, watchman, superintendent). Elders are overseers, guardians of the affairs of God's church. ***They must first be watchers of their own lives. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock.*** Paul highlights the qualifications of these leaders when he wrote to Timothy (***1 Tim 3:1-15***), ***Men worthy of respect, able to teach, of good testimony. One that rules his family well. Elders are to watch their lives as Christians,*** for they must account for how they watch the church of God. ***They must guard the church because the church would be attacked, (v.29)*** savage wolves will come to attack God's church from the outside and from within the church and it is the job of the elders, overseers to make sure the

church continues to proclaim the truth. Overseers have to be on their guard for false teachings, false ideas that many want to infiltrate the church. **Titus 1:9 says that an elder must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.**

Elders encourage and rebuke those who oppose sound teaching.

The other word to describe the function of these leaders. Shepherds.

(v.28) **Be shepherds** (poimainein): **shepherd, pastor, to tend for.**

The overseer shepherds the flock, the church of Christ; Shepherds guided the sheep to green pastures, and to water, they protected the flock from danger.

Ps.23 what the shepherd does: The LORD is my shepherd....

Acts 20:28 Be shepherds of God's church which he bought with his own blood.

Jesus is called the Good Shepherd John 10:11-18 *He doesn't run at the sight of danger, he lays down his life for the sheep, they sheep follow his voice.*

For three years Paul warned these leaders of the dangers that they would encounter as shepherds of the church of God. **(v.31)**

Churches were led by these leaders whom we know as elders, guardians or overseers and These leaders will need lots of prayers and support as they continue to minister God's church as leaders. ***The elders are the leaders, guardians, the shepherds of the church of God. And God would hold them responsible in how they do their job as leaders of his church.***

I would like to conclude with Peter's words to the elders. **1 Peter 5:1-4**

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's suffering and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (NIV)