

Biblical Eldership



“A healthy church is a growing church; only healthy spiritual leaders can nurture a healthy church.”

By Pastor Ivan Leung

At the Annual Membership Meeting in March, all church members will have the opportunity to participate in the process of elder's election. With one heart, we seek God's will to elect, through secret ballots, the required number of elders for the coming year. We give thanks to the Lord for the hard work and dedication of the elders, and pray to God for their faithful servanthood.

In this month's newsletter, I plan to share with you about the teaching of biblical eldership in the New Testament. Although there was no specific mention of the origin of an “elder”, there were numerous

references to the teaching of an elder. (Acts 11:30;14:23, 15:2-6, 23;20:17, 28; I Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; James 5:14-15; I Peter 5:1-4). Let us ponder the qualifications and responsibilities of a church elder by reading the Scripture.

The Qualifications of an Elder

A. Having Superior Moral and Spiritual Attributes

According to the Bible, the requirements of elders are connected to their moral and spiritual attributes because the greatest possible impact does not come from the title or job descriptions, but from the elders'

actions and character. The highest qualification is being “above reproach”. That does not mean that the individual is flawless, or close to perfection; rather, he is “beyond accusation” in terms of moral and spiritual standards. Paul's view of being “above reproach” includes four aspects.

1. Family: Being faithful to the spouse, whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. (I Timothy 3:2,4; Titus 1:6)
2. Character: Being temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. (I Timothy 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8).
3. Spiritual Characteristics: must be hospitable, one who loves what is good; who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. (Titus 1:8)
4. Social Reputation: must also have a good reputation in school, at work, or within social circles, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. (I Timothy 3:7)

The Bible emphasizes that the prerequisite of an elder is spiritual maturity and excellence in spiritual character, not capability or experience. The spiritual tasks of the Lord can only be fulfilled by spiritual leaders utilizing spiritual ways or solutions.

B. Being Examples To The Flock
The Scripture reminds church elders that they need to set good examples

to others. God's calling to His people is, "...that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe..." (Philippians 2:15). Therefore, being the spiritual leader of His people must show a good example in daily life. We can see why Peter reminded the elders of Asia to be "examples to the flock" (I Peter 5:3b).

Like Peter, Paul fully recognized the importance of following Jesus' example. He relentlessly tried his best to model after Jesus and urged others to do the same. "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" (Philippians 3:17). "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1).

C. Desiring a Noble Task

Paul pointed out another attribute of the **overseer** (synonymous to **elder**, Titus 1:5-7). "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, **he desires a noble task**" (I Timothy 3:1). What is "desiring a noble task"? According to the NIV Bible, it means longing for the opportunity to serve the Lord. Paul reiterated that an elder should not be longing for the position; instead, he should be yearning for more opportunities to serve our Lord, in order that God's plan can be edified in his life.

Peter Drucker is a renowned authority on spiritual leadership in the 20th century. He thinks that a spiritual leader should hold a high regard for responsibilities, but a slight consideration for title, fame, riches and authority, which echoes Paul's idea of an elder: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task (I Timothy 3:1). This "noble task" does not entail title or authority, but a delight in serving the Lord.

D. Loving and Upholding the Bible

As an elder, being able to teach is an important criterion pointed out by Paul (I Timothy 3:2). He exhorted Timothy, as "...a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). The requirement for spiritual leader is beyond correctly handling the word of truth; it also involves delivering God's truth in a systematic, comprehensive and applicable way. This teaching of Truth is more than a teaching of knowledge, but a teaching of Life. Being able to teach also means to "...entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (II Timothy 2:2). This includes correctly distinguishing between The Truth and heresies.

For, the church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15), so Paul advised the elders, "He 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" (Titus 1:9). Possessing "sound doctrine", loving and upholding biblical principles to build up the spiritual church in a non-secular manner are essential qualities of an elder.

The Responsibilities of an Elder

1. Praying Incessantly for the Church

All spiritual leaders in the Bible are prayerful individuals. Jesus himself set an excellent example: He began His servanthood by prayer (Luke 3:21-22); and He ended His earthly journey by praying too (Luke 23:46). The Scripture teaches the elders to pray incessantly for the Church and all who need intercessions. "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14).

2. Leading and Protecting the Church

In the past, Paul and Barnabas were sent off by the Church at Antioch to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. When the new church was established, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Whenever Paul planted a church, he would

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (NIV)

Overseers and Deacons

¹Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. ²Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Titus' Task on Crete

⁵The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹He 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.

appoint some elders to remain there to oversee the congregation. Paul expected the elders to protect the church by preaching sound doctrine and refuting opposing thoughts and wrong teachings so that he could move on to other un-reached lands.

Another essential responsibility of an elder is to oversee the church in a spiritual way. This was what Paul exhorted the elders in Ephesus, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Paul's advice was to “Keep watch over yourselves,” and “be shepherds of the church of God”. To keep watch means to continue to watch and to be extremely vigilant.

Therefore, Paul urged the elders in Ephesus to keep watch over themselves, and to watch over the whole church, because the church needs to guard against crises. Therefore, as elders, you must watch over your spiritual life, so that you could monitor the spiritual condition of the church. Richard Baxter (1615-1691) mentioned in his classic writing “The Reformed Pastor”, “Satan knows if he can smite the shepherds, that he may scatter the flock.”

3. Shepherding the Entire Flock

Paul stressed the importance of willingly caring and nurturing all

the flock. He told elders to serve others not out of coercion, but do so because “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28a). Paul reminded them that it was the Holy Spirit that placed them as overseers to a particular flock. His use of “all the flock” carries a lot of significance. An elder should protect all of the flock, not just some of his chosen flock. Not a single one should be neglected, because the entire flock is precious, which Jesus “bought with his own blood.”

Peter put an equal emphasis on being willing to be shepherds of God's flock. He advised, “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” (I Peter 5:2-3). This commitment should be prompted by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has put this serving heart inside an elder, and will likewise bestow upon him the wisdom and the necessary spiritual gifts to nurture his flock.

4. Directing the Affairs of the Church in God's Will

Paul pointed out that an overseer is “...entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless” (Titus 1:5-7). Therefore, the elders are appointed by the Lord with the mission of caring for God's family, and this

spiritual family belongs to the Lord. Moreover, Peter stressed, “as **God wants you to be**” (I Peter 5:2). Paul elaborated, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (I Timothy 5:17). Accordingly, an elder's responsibility is to direct the affairs of the church, draft various bylaws and policies based on Biblical principles according to God's will, so that, “...everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (I Cor. 14:40), for the highest glory of God.

A healthy church is a growing church; only healthy spiritual leaders can nurture a healthy church. May God continue to bless our church in the selection of desirable elders according to His will. Let us pray with one heart for building up a healthy multi-site church for the extension of God's kingdom. May His name be glorified.

**Blessings,
Pastor Ivan Leung**

The Election of Elders

- An Overview of the Process

General Information

Church Elders are to be members in good standing and who have a good testimony in loving the Lord, His church and His people. They are to meet Biblical qualifications, particularly from 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Duties of Elders are:

- a. To manage the spiritual affairs of the church.
- b. To review the qualifications of those joining the church as members.
- c. To be a member of the "Church Discipline Committee" as needed.

Responsibilities of Elders are:

- a. To attend Elders Board meetings.
- b. To attend Sunday Service and all special meetings of the church.
- c. To attend prayer meetings and pray for the church earnestly.
- d. To serve actively in various ministries of the church.

The Election Process

For this year the Nominating Committee has nominated 4 Elder candidates and the membership has nominated 4 Elder candidates. Thus, there are a total of 8 candidates in this year's election. Please see the insert for an introduction to each of the candidates.

There are 6 positions open for the Elders Board this year.
This position is for a 2 year term from April 2009 to March 2011.

Please prayerfully consider each of the candidates.

All VCAC - Knight St./Fraser Lands/North Burnaby church members are encouraged to attend the Annual Membership Meeting. The Elders election will be voted by confidential ballot at this meeting.

All members (those who have been baptized at VCAC or transferred membership) are eligible to participate in the election of Elders. In accordance to our Church By-law, you cannot vote by proxy and must be present at the time of voting for your vote to count.

Please be on time for the meeting as the voting period is at the beginning of the meeting. No ballots will be accepted after we start the counting process.

VCAC Annual Membership Meeting

Date: Sunday March 29, 2009
Time: 2:30 pm
Place: VCAC - Fraser Lands, 3330 S.E. Marine Drive

Meeting Agenda:

1. Praise & Worship
2. Opening Prayer
3. Election of Elders
4. Senior Pastor's Report
5. Financial Report
6. Members' Sharing and Testimony - Open Section
7. Results of Elders Election
8. Closing Prayer