

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF ELDERS

A. First Appearance

1. Luke 9:22

[But He warned them] ...saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Luke 9:22).

Beginning with Ex. 3:16, we are introduced to a group within Israel called "the elders" who are consistently identified as leaders in Israel. They are presented in a negative light in the Gospels.

2. Acts 11:30

And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders (Acts 11:30).

It is a bit surprising (given "the elders" negative representation in the Gospels) that we read in Acts about a group bearing the same name and positively associated with the church in Jerusalem. It would seem that the institution was viable and capable of serving the welfare of the NT church despite the abuses it suffered at the hands of men who used their office to seek Jesus' death.

B. Normative Presence

1. Acts 14:21-23

And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:21-23).

For Paul, establishing elders for each local fellowship seemed to be a consistent pattern. Note, by the way, that "appointed" is not a word that excludes "congregational involvement" in the selection process.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

2. Titus 1:5

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you (Titus 1:5).

The organization of a local church is incomplete without the presence of elders. Note that the phrase, “elders in every city,” contemplates a plurality of elders in every location where there is an expression of a local church.

Key Principle: The essential organization of the local church involves the recognition of a plurality of elders.

This principle begs us to answer the question: Why? What purpose do elders serve in a local fellowship? What do they DO? And how is this related to the health and welfare of a local fellowship? The next three sections speak to the question of their purpose.

II. KEY PASSAGES THAT RELATE TO ELDERS:

There are ten NT passages which represent the “mother lode” of biblical truth regarding the elders. Each of these passages go beyond “incidental reference” to the elders. It is important to know the reference and basic content of each of these ten passages. The key verse in each passage is underlined. It is also worth noting the various “titles” for elders that are used interchangeably in some of these verses.

A. Acts 20:28-35

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Acts 20:28-35 is a key description of elders' RESPONSIBILITIES.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

B. Eph 4:11-13

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

Eph. 4:11-13 is another key description of the core RESPONSIBILITIES of elders.

C. 1 Thess. 5:12-13

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

1 Thess. 5:12-13 is a key passage for understanding how the congregation should RESPOND to its leaders.

D. 1 Tim. 3:1-7

It is a trustworthy statement: If a man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

1 Tim. 3:1-7 is one of two key passages that relate to the QUALIFICATIONS for an elder.

E. 1 Tim. 5:17-22

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

a spirit of partiality. Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

1 Tim. 5:17-22 is another key passage for understanding how the congregation should RESPOND to its leaders. It also gives us some key insight into the RESPONSIBILITIES of elders and the PROCESS by which they are to be recognized.

F. Titus 1:5-11

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach.

Titus 1:5-11 is the other key passages that relate to the QUALIFICATIONS for an elder.

G. Heb. 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Heb. 13:7 emphasizes the RESPONSE of the sheep to their leaders.

H. Heb. 13:17

Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Heb. 13:17 also emphasizes the RESPONSE of the sheep to their leaders.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

I. James 5:14-15

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

James 5:14-15 is a key passage concerning one of the RESPONSIBILITIES of the elders.

J. I Pet. 5:1-4

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

1 Pet. 5:1-4 is a key passage for understanding the MANNER in which elders undertake their duties.

Key Principle: It is essential to understand what God says about elders. His instructions are clear and sufficient. Substitution of an institution of our own making will oppose God's good plan for a local church.

III. TITLES FOR ELDERS

A. Elder

There are several terms that are used interchangeably to refer to elders, the first of which, obviously, is the term "elder." This English word is a common rendering for the Greek term, *presbuteros*. The root word, *presbutes*, appears in Luke 1:18; Titus 2:2, and Philemon 9 and denotes someone advanced in age. *Presbuteros* can emphasize one who is elderly (Acts 2:17; 1 Tim. 5:1). It can be used in a comparative way to distinguish an older from a younger (Luke 15:25). The term is often used in a technical sense (in the Synoptics and first part of Acts) to refer to a certain class of Jewish religious leaders. It is used in Revelation (see Rev. 4:4) in a technical sense to describe a class of angelic beings. In the latter half of Acts and the NT Epistles, it is most often used to describe local church leaders.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

This word is not a title which denotes the “function” of elders but their reputation. In the biblical culture, the elder would be considered a respected individual, someone who is venerated for his seasoned wisdom. So this term is relevant to how the congregation views the elders, but not to his function.

B. Overseer

The term *overseer* is a rendering of the Greek word, *episkopos*. This noun only appears in the NT five times. Four are references to officers in the church, once it refers to Christ.

Acts 20:28

Phil. 1:1

1 Tim. 3:2

Titus 1:7

1 Pet. 2:25

The associated verb, *episkopeo*, is used twice (Heb. 12:15; 1 Pet. 5:2); A cognate noun, *episkope*, four times (Luke 19:44; Acts 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:12). Three of these verses are very illuminating:

Heb. 12:15

Luke 19:44

1 Pet. 2:12

Taken together, these passages suggest the idea of “on-site inspections.” The overseer is one who is “seeing to it” that the congregation is about what it needs to be.

C. Shepherd

The term translated “shepherd” is the Greek word, *poimen*. The word appears 17 times in the NT and most often denotes literal shepherds.

Luke 2:8

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

Given the prominence of shepherds in the culture of Israel, “shepherds” are a rich metaphor for denoting Jesus’ role.

Heb. 13:20

1 Pet. 2:25

“Feeding” is clearly prominent as a shepherd’s function (cf. 1 Cor. 9:7; John 21:16), but this does not exhaust the range of what is required.

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep” (John 10:11-13).

A shepherd provides whatever is necessary to promote the welfare of the flock. He feeds, but he also protects. Notice how there is a disciplinary component to the shepherd’s role in a passage like Rev. 2:27 (wherein the verb, *poimaino*, is used).

The title, “shepherd,” is clearly used as a title for officials in the local church in Eph. 4:11. The cognate verb, *poimaino*, is used in two of our key passages that relate to elders (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2).

D. Leader

In Hebrews 13:7, 17, and 24, the verb, *hegeomai*, is used as a participle to denote local church leaders. The cognate noun, *hegemon*, is consistently used in the NT to designate a provincial authority and is often translated as “governor.” But the meaning of *hegeomai* seems to have a fairly broad range in the NT. Indeed, this term is used to describe the response that the congregation ought to give its leaders in 1 Thess. 5:13.

Jam. 1:2 – “count”

Luke 22:26 – “the leader”

This term could be describing “one who counts” in the sense of one who is to be esteemed. Hence it would not be a functional description. But the secular usage suggests the idea of governance and thus the possibility that this is a functional description emphasizing leadership.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

These four terms (especially the latter three) do not seem to describe a specific responsibility of the elder as much as they each describe his overall responsibility as seen through several different lenses. Taken together, they answer to a passage in which Jesus describes an undesirable condition He observed in Israel.

And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36).

Jesus sees that there is something vital missing when sheep do not have a shepherd. Shepherds supply something essential. And when that something is missing, sheep become insecure, defeated, and lethargic. When the Bible calls the local fellowship a flock, and calls its leaders shepherds, it is declaring that **when shepherds don't "shep," the sheep are at risk**. Congregations NEED elders, overseers, shepherds, leaders.

Key Principle: As an elder, the local church leader is a respected source of wisdom. As an overseer, he is one who watches over the congregation. As a shepherd, he provides the nourishment and protection vital to the best spiritual interests of the flock. As a "leader," he supplies guidance and direction that assists the congregation in its efforts to please the Master. Leaders are a vital asset. When they are not present or are failing to fulfill their responsibility, the spiritual welfare of the flock is jeopardized.

These titles (especially the latter three) name the general responsibility of elders. But several key passages give us a much more full understanding of what is entailed.

IV. FUNCTIONAL DESCRIPTIONS OF ELDERS

The overall responsibility of an elder can be understood from material found in our key passages regarding elders. Note that we are dividing the functional descriptions into two categories: "General Responsibility" and "Specific Responsibilities." The latter are component parts of the former.

A. General Responsibility

In some of the passages where elders are discussed, the NT seems to describe the sum of what the elder does or his "core" responsibility. There is an element of subjectivity in this evaluation, so it should not be too rigidly applied.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

1. Shepherd:

The term, *shepherd*, is used as both a noun (see above) and a verb to describe what an elder does. The verb is used in both Acts 20 and 1 Pet. 5 of the elder's responsibility for the spiritual growth and welfare of the members of the flock. Protecting, caring for, and nourishing the flock is the focal point of his energies.

- ▶ *Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to **shepherd the church** of God which he purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).*

It is interesting to note that in Acts 20:28, "guarding" (*prosexo*) is identified as a "specific" responsibility which grows out of the general responsibility to shepherd the flock. Guarding is not all that is involved in shepherding, but is most definitely one of the things involved in shepherding (see below). For a more comprehensive summary of the range of specific responsibilities for the shepherd, note Ezek. 34:1-5.

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered"' (Ezek. 34:1-5).

- ▶ *Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **shepherd the flock** of God among you (1 Pet. 5:1).*

It is interesting to note, in 1 Pet. 5:4, that Jesus is presented as the model of what a shepherd should be and the One to whom all under-shepherds are accountable.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

2. Equiper

The elder is committed to helping those allotted to his care become spiritually healthy (first priority) and then skillful and effective in ministry to others (second priority).

- ▶ *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the **equipping of the saints for the work of service**, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).*

There are several key observations to be made from this passage. First, the concept of “equipping” embraces both spiritual fitness and spiritual effectiveness – observe the use of *katartidzo* (cognate of NT hapax *katartismos*) in both Gal. 6:1 (emphasis on fitness) and Matt. 4:21 (effectiveness). 1 Thess. 3:10 is also instructive.

For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? (1 Thess. 3:9-10).

Note the link between fitness and effectiveness found in 2 Pet. 1:5-8.

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

Second, observe that the congregation constitute the ministers. The leaders are coaches who supply what is needed for the members of the congregation to do the work of the ministry.

Third, note that teaching is a “specific responsibility” that is closely connected to the work of the equiper (“shepherds / teachers” are named in Eph. 4:11.). Biblical instruction is a primary means by which spiritual fitness and effectiveness are produced.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

3. Manager

One of the titles which we have considered above, “leader,” was based upon the substantive participle of *begeomai* used three times in Heb. 13. But in 1 Thess. 5:12-13, we discover a different verb being used that adds another nuance to our understanding of the general responsibility of the elder.

- ▶ *But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and **have charge** over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another (1 Thess. 5:12-13).*

The term employed here is *proistemi*, and it is used in several other contexts to denote the general function of the elder.

- ▶ 1 Tim 3:4-5 (used of a qualification AND a responsibility)
- ▶ 1 Tim. 3:12 (used of a qualification)
- ▶ 1 Tim. 5:17 (used of a responsibility)

The appearance of the term in Titus 3:8, 14 is instructive.

This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to engage (proistemi) in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men (Tit. 3:8).

And let our people also learn to engage in good deeds to meet (proistemi) pressing needs, that they may not be unfruitful (Tit. 3:14).

Here are a couple of observations we can make about this term.

First, the management responsibility of the elder for the church matches that of a father’s management of his household.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

Second, *proistemi* suggests a domain in which things are “under control” as opposed to “out of control.”

Third, the passages in Titus 3 which use *proistemi* add the idea of being “engaged” as opposed to “disengaged.”

Taken together, these passages depict an elder who has a good handle on what is going on in the congregation and is dealing with issues before things get out of control. He is proactive instead of reactive. He takes the initiative to keep things functioning in a harmonious and productive way.

It is more than an interesting side note that this characteristic ought to be observable in the home life of the elder. Effective “management” ought to be observed in a potential candidate for elder in his leadership of his household, both its people and its operation. Passivity, being “out of touch” with his family, being “checked out” or distracted – all of these constitute violations of what should be seen on the home front of a man suited to leadership in the body. Note the parallel concept in 1 Pet. 3:7 – literally *live with your wives according to knowledge*.

Note: It is striking that the idea of “calling the shots,” “charting the course,” “barking orders,” “getting everyone onboard,” and other descriptors of leadership as it is practiced in business and government are missing from the core responsibility of the elder. This is not an oversight.

And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves (Luke 22:24-27).

Jesus identifies Himself as the prototype for a new kind of leader, one who practices servant leadership, not lordship leadership. The natural predisposition of men is toward lordship leadership. Servant leadership is only achieved with conscious and concerted effort.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

Key Principle: The general responsibility of an elder, regardless of whether it is described as shepherding, equipping, or managing, is clearly an exercise in service, not lordship leadership.

It is also worth noting that the most natural assumption of what it means to be an elder – to have meetings in order to make important decisions – is missing, if not only incidentally related, to the task assigned to elders. “Eldering” is more about doing, i.e. serving people, than it is about meetings and making decisions.

It is also worthy of note that the NT recognizes proximity as a regulating factor in the work of shepherding. 1 Pet. 5:2 calls the elders to *shepherd the flock of God among you*. 1 Thess. 5:12 describes local church leaders as *those who diligently labor among you*. Shepherding is not something that can be done by remote control. It cannot be accomplished at a distance. It is something done in the midst of, rubbing shoulders with, and coming alongside people.

B. Specific Responsibilities

We have considered three titles – overseer, shepherd, and leader – and three verbs – shepherd, equip, and manage – that tell us, in a general way, about what an elder does. But in many of our key passages, we can also discern some special responsibilities. Think of these as tools in an elder’s toolkit, specific activities that he engages in as the need requires in order to fulfill his core responsibility noted above.

Think of these specific responsibilities as biblically identified means by which to fulfill an elder’s general assignment. For example, the elder is to shepherd. That is his core responsibility. But in his role as a shepherd, there may be times when this requires “guarding.” At another time, “feeding” would be appropriate. And at another, perhaps “helping the weak.”

There are some connections between these specific responsibilities. For example, “guarding” may lead to the identification of a truth crisis by which families are being upset. This, in turn, would lead to the need for a ministry of the Word, specifically the “silencing” use of the Word in which the elder refutes “those who contradict,” and then follows up with another ministry of the Word, the “health inducing” ministry of “exhorting in sound doctrine.”

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

1. Guardian

The elder confronts anything, either from within or outside the church, which threatens to undermine the spiritual welfare of the members of the body.

- ▶ **Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock,** *among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with His own blood* (Acts 20:28).

“Be on guard” translates *prosexete* (from *prosexo*) which is also found in Luke 21:34.

“Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap” (Luke 21:34).

- ▶ *I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, **be on the alert*** (Acts 20:29-31).

Here the word, *gregoreo*, is used which is found 23 x’s in the NT. The appearance of the word in Matt. 26:41 suggests the idea of attentiveness to spiritual danger. Its antithesis would be the kind of spiritual dullness by which the fact that someone is in danger doesn’t register on the leader’s mind.

- ▶ *For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, **who must be silenced** because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach* (Titus 1:10-11).

This passage probably contemplates activity that bridges the gap between guarding and ministering the Word. It certainly presents a picture which is out of step with our politically correct and tolerant times. In his watchfulness, the elder is alert to anyone who is “teaching things they should not teach.”

- ▶ *Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for **they keep watch** over your souls* (Heb. 13:17).

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

In Heb. 13:17, yet another term for the elder's role of "guarding" is used. The word is *agrupneo* and it is only used 4 x's in the NT, *agrupnia* twice. The word has the basic idea of "sleeplessness," and denotes someone who doesn't doze off at his post.

The elder is one who is vigilant and watchful. He is alert to spiritual danger, false teaching, and internal threats. He is poised to spring into action whenever there is a "carnality outbreak," unsettling error, or an external threat to the health and effectiveness of the body.

2. Teacher

Out of a personal devotion to God's truth, the elder will diligently and consistently study the Word. As a result of the internalization of truth sustained by this devotion, he is capable of nourishing those in his care from the truth of God's Word and exposing ideas which are harmful to their spiritual growth.

- ▶ **holding fast the faithful word** *which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to **exhort** in sound doctrine and to **refute** those who contradict* (Titus 1:9).

When Paul called the Ephesian elders to Miletus, he said, "*I commend you . . . to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up...*" (Acts 20:32). The internal fortification that is necessary to an elder's effectiveness comes from the Word. 2 Tim. 3:16 is not without pertinence here: Anyone who would be thoroughly equipped for every good work will find such an adequacy in studying God's Word. It is this internalization which is the necessary prerequisite for the twofold ministry of the Word that is described as "exhorting" and "refuting." "Exhorting" is the term, *parakaleo*. "Refuting" is the verb, *elegxo*.

Parakaleo and *paraklesis* (which appear many times in the NT) have the meanings of "to beseech," "to exhort," and "to encourage." The idea of making an appeal to another's will in a way that provides fuel for them to make a proper choice is at the heart of the term. The object of this exhortation is health inducing truth. The elder who is devoted to the Word will identify the truth that can produce spiritual health and fitness in another and administer it in a way that answers to a disciple's hunger to grow.

For *elegxo*, see Matt. 18:15 ("reprove"); 1 Cor. 14:24 ("convicted"); 1 Tim. 5:20 ("rebuke"); Titus 1:13 ("reprove"). This term is clearly one

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

which calls for confrontation of those who are “contradicting” the truth.

Exhorting and refuting constitute a matched set of Word driven ministries. The former seeks to add what is missing or reinforce what must be strengthened, the latter to take away what doesn't belong. Both of these ministries of the Word must be exercised in accordance with the “manner” descriptors noted below or they could easily be used as justification for clubbing people with the Word. This is not about an elder defending or vindicating himself by the Word but silencing voices that promote spiritual disease and nourishing the flock on truth that imparts life.

In 1 Thess. 5:12-13, the leaders of the church are described as those who “give you instruction.” This instruction is *nouthetountas* (from *noutheteo*) which is also used in 1 Thess 5:14.

And we urge you, brethren, admonish (noutheteo) the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men (1 Thess. 5:14).

In context, “*admonish*” emphasizes the negative side of the Word ministry.

It is important to note 1 Tim. 5:17

- ▶ *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17).*

There are an important series of comparisons embedded in this verse, one (perhaps two) of which pertains to the elder's ministry of the Word. “Rule well” is the word *proistemi* noted above and is a descriptor of the core responsibility of all elders. Some from among the elders do this “well” and are to be considered worthy of double honor. Then a third group is introduced, a group described as those who (implied) “rule well” and who “work hard at preaching and teaching.” It is not clear if this third group is distinguished from the previous two for the fact that they preach and teach (which would suggest that the previous two do not preach and teach). Or are they distinguished from the previous two for the fact that they **work hard** at preaching and teaching (which would imply that the other two groups also preach and teach but do not “work hard” at it)?

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

Regardless of where one lands on this interpretive problem, it is unquestionably clear that all elders are to be sufficiently devoted to the Word to impart to others truth which produces spiritual health and to use the truth with enough skill and poignancy to silence those who contradict it.

Perhaps not all elders need to be effective public speakers, but it is absolutely essential for them to be men who are capable and persuasive in their handling of the Scriptures. Heb. 13:7 simply states that the leaders of the church “spoke the word of God to you.” They are “truth talkers.”

3. Example

An elder presents to the congregation a living example of how the Word of God should influence our words, thoughts, and actions. He commits himself to living a life that affirms the biblical qualifications for an elder in his personal life, in his marriage, and in his family life.

- ▶ *Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, **imitate their faith** (Heb. 13:7).*
- ▶ *Shepherd the flock of God among you, **proving to be examples** to the flock (1 Pet. 5:2-3).*

4. Helper

The elder actively seeks out solutions for those who are experiencing difficulty and material need.

- ▶ *In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner **you must help the weak** and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).*

5. Intercessor

The elder is consistent and earnest in prayer for the flock.

- ▶ *Let him call for the elders of the church, and **let them pray** over him (James 5:14).*

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

6. Hospitality

It is suggestive that both lists of the qualifications for an elder include “hospitable.” This term (and its cognate) are only used elsewhere in three passages. In every case they describe a ministry which is incumbent upon all saints.

Be hospitable to one another without complaint (1 Pet. 4:9).

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it (Heb. 13:2).

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love . . . practicing hospitality (Rom. 12:10, 13).

The presence of “hospitable” as a qualification for an elder coupled with its use elsewhere to describe a ministry enjoined upon all saints tells us that elders are to provide a healthy model of a hospitality ministry for the congregation to observe and benefit from.

From a practical standpoint, this suggests the willingness of an elder to place at the disposal of other saints that which God has entrusted to him. This is not the same as providing to others a blank check nor is it an invitation for free-loading.

It is important to observe that these are the clearly defined specific responsibilities of elders. The perspicuity of Scripture declares that anything else which someone might propose as an essential duty can rise no higher than a “possible involvement of secondary importance.” The early church leadership was very conscious of its biblical priorities.

And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2-4).

Key Principle: Leadership effectiveness turns on a devotion to the biblically mandated responsibilities of eldering. When these assignments are neglected, there is no way for church health and productivity to be realized.

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

V. THE “MANNER” OF ELDERS

Looking at the responsibilities for the elder, it is easy to imagine a situation where “extreme measures” might be called for. For example, when facing the need to silence contradictors who are upsetting families, an elder could easily gravitate toward heavy handed measures to overpower a vocal faction. But there the “manner” descriptors in our 10 key passages serve as guard rails, limits on the specific means an elder may use to fulfill his responsibilities. There are many NT “manner” descriptors for all believers (check out “in a spirit of gentleness” in Gal. 6:1-2). But there are quite a few that are specifically mentioned with respect to elders. The obvious conclusion is that these “manner” descriptors are highlighting areas of targeted temptation for the elder as he seeks to serve the local flock.

- A. Remembering (Acts 20:31)
- B. Hard Working (Acts 20:35; “*diligently*” - 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17)
- C. Peaceably (1 Thess. 5:13)
- D. Eagerly / not for sordid gain (*aspires & desires* - 1 Tim. 3:1, 3; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:2)
- E. Gently / not pugnaciously (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)
- F. Reasonably (“*uncontentious*” - 1 Tim. 3:3; “*sensible*” - Titus 1:8)
- G. Humbly (1 Tim. 3:6)
- H. Justly (“*without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality*” - 1 Tim. 5:21; “*just*” - Titus 1:8)
- I. Deliberately / not hastily (1 Tim. 5:22; “*not quick-tempered*” - Titus 1:7; “*sensible*” - Titus 1:8; “*self-controlled*” - Titus 1:8)
- J. As Stewards (Titus 1:7; “*as those who will give an account*” - Heb. 13:17)
- K. Selflessly / not insistent on his way (“*not self willed*” - Titus 1:7)
- L. Voluntarily / not under compulsion (1 Pet. 5:2)
- M. As Examples / not as overlords (1 Pet. 5:3)

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

VI. RESPONSE TO ELDERS

The congregation is given specific instruction about how to respond to its leaders. One of these responses is reciprocal. The rest are outlined as responses that the congregation is to give to its leaders. Notice how (in Heb. 13:17), a failure to respond in the manner outlined will actually undermine leadership's ability to promote the welfare of the flock. To fail to respond to its leaders as outlined is for the congregation to hobble itself!

- A. Promote Peace With (1 Thess. 5:13)
- B. Appreciate (1 Thess. 5:12)
- C. Esteem (1 Thess 5:13)
- D. Honor (1 Tim. 5:17)

Note that this honor includes remuneration (1 Tim. 5:17-18)

- E. Obey (Heb. 13:17)
- F. Submit (Heb. 13:17)

Note that the elders are nowhere instructed to “subdue” the congregation.

- G. Sponsor Joy (Heb. 13:17)

Note how (in 3 John 4) responsiveness to the truth is a primary means by which to promote an elder's joy.

VII. QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER

In Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3, we are presented with two lists of qualifications for elders. Some elements are found in both lists, some are unique to one or the other. Taken together, they identify 20 different criteria by which to evaluate a man's suitability to serve as an elder. There are several key questions which must be addressed before we are ready to look at each of these qualifications individually.

- A. Key Considerations
 - 1. Are these 20 qualifications suggestive or definitive?

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

2. Who determines whether a man meets these qualifications?
3. How are these qualifications to be applied? Absolutely or in some relative sense?
4. In what type of process are these qualifications to be employed?

B. Specific Qualifications

QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER

Scriptural Description	Definition
Overview	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ An overseer, then, must be above reproach / if any man be above reproach / For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ no criticism "sticks"; seems "out of character" with what is known about the man
Domestic	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ the husband of one wife ▶ He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?) ▶ having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ fidelity and devotion to his wife ▶ provides effective and proactive leadership in the home ▶ his children demonstrate authentic commitment to Jesus
Personal (Heart/Habits)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ loving what is good ▶ temperate ▶ prudent / sensible ▶ self-controlled ▶ not addicted to wine (2x) ▶ free from the love of money / not fond of sordid gain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ values what God values ▶ sober-minded, sensible, not rash or excessive ▶ actions guided by principle ▶ disciplined – takes control of habits ▶ uninfluenced by addictive substances ▶ unaffected by desire to become rich

Shepherdology: How to raise healthy productive sheep

Relational

- ▶ respectable
- ▶ just
- ▶ but gentle
- ▶ hospitable (2x)
- ▶ [not] pugnacious (2x)
- ▶ uncontentious
- ▶ not self-willed
- ▶ not quick tempered
- ▶ well-ordered life
- ▶ fair
- ▶ not harsh or dismissive
- ▶ freely shares what he has
- ▶ does not use force to prevail over others
- ▶ not argumentative
- ▶ does not have to have his own way
- ▶ not easily angered, does not use rage to prevail over others

Student of the Word

- ▶ devout
- ▶ able to teach / holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict
- ▶ takes his relationship with the Lord seriously
- ▶ devoted to God's Word / knows how to promote spiritual health with the Word

Seasoned

- ▶ and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.
- ▶ spent sufficient time in the trenches to temper arrogance

Respected

- ▶ and he must have a good reputation with those outside the church
- ▶ provides a credible witness to and example of integrity to his society.