

On Hiring Elders

I. Introduction

- A. I have a good preacher friend that is going through process of finding a job
1. The process is pretty strenuous—résumé, audio sermons, video sermons
 - a. There are phone pre-interviews and formal face-to-face interviews
 - b. One delegation showed up at a retreat he was leading for another church
 - c. That is all before you come to formal tryout (or “*dog-and-pony show*”)
 - 1) Usually means preaching sermon, teach classes, meet-n-greet potluck
 - 2) There are meetings with the elders, staff and the selection committee
 2. It’s a pain to hire a preacher (*why I’ve been here; too much trouble to hire*)
 - a. The average preacher stays 5-6 years (youth ministers stay 2-3 years)
 - 1) **Joke:** How many youth ministers does it take to change a bulb?
 - 2) **Answer:** None, they aren’t around long enough for it to burn out!
 - b. Why so much trouble for such a few years? (*Sometimes you get stuck!*)
- B. **Point:** Go to this much trouble to hire preacher, why not when selecting elders?
1. We generally treat elders like Supreme Court judges— *with lifetime tenure*
 - a. Appointing elders has more and longer impact than hiring any minister.
 - 1) It is the elders who frame our vision and focus as a church.
 - 2) The elders set church policies and determine church ministries.
 - b. Maybe we need is more of a dog-and-pony show when appointing elders!
 2. Maybe not! Next week, we do begin formal process of selecting elders.
- C. I’ve been asked to begin the process with a sermon on what makes an elder
1. We’ll continue in class Wednesday (*too much material for one sermon*)
 - a. If you’ll come early Wednesday, we’ll feed you supper (*what a deal!*)
 - b. Today, I’ll survey the list of qualities from a particular perspective
 2. Before you hire someone for a job, you need to know why you hire them.
 - a. We want guys who are loyal, faithful and dependable (*describes my dog*)
 - b. But you also need to know that they can do the job they’re hired to do!
 3. That’s what I want to look at this morning—*the job description of elders*

II. First, Elders Must Teach the Faith

- A. It seems the job of elders most stressed in the New Testament is **TEACHING**
1. This emphasis on the teaching role is seen in different ways
 - a. One of qualities Paul mentions in 1 Timothy is “*able to teach*” (**3:2**)
 - b. He must be able to teach because that is part of his job (**Titus 1:9, NLT**)
He must have a strong and steadfast belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with right teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.
 - c. Paul seems to combine “*pastors and teachers*” into one role (**Eph 4:11**)
and some to have the work of caring for and teaching God’s people (NCV)
 2. Paul makes two points on elders and teaching in **1 Timothy 5:17**.
¹⁷*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.*
 - a. **First**, he says that some of the elders would be paid for their work
 - 1) He uses OT quotes on “*muzzle the ox*” and “*worker and wages*”
 - 2) This seems to fit well all the statements about elders and money
 - a) Peter warns elders not to be “*greedy for money*” (**1 Pet 5:2**)
 - b) Paul tells Timothy elders aren’t to be a “*lover of money*” (**1 Tim 3:2**)
 - c) Titus is told that elders can’t be “*greedy for gain*” (**Titus 1:7**)
 - b. **Second**, some (not all) elders had responsibility for preaching & teaching
 - 1) In the NT, the roles of **pastor**, **bishop** and **elder** refer to same person
 - 2) Elders were shepherds (pastors) who were to feed the flock of God
 3. Whatever else elders do, their primary role is to be teachers of God’s word
- B. Teaching wasn’t just a part of the job of elders—*not just an item on checklist*
1. Teaching the faith to others seems to have been the main role of elders.
 - a. All elders weren’t all paid to teach full time, but they were all teachers.
 - b. We often think of elders in terms of business sense and management
 2. But I believe that Job One for elders is teaching the faith to others
 - a. Teaching isn’t necessarily in formal sense (*pulpit or Sun School*)
 - 1) Informal teaching like small groups, 1-on-1 evangelism, teens, etc
 - 2) Also willingness to encourage or instruct privately (“*counseling*”)
 - 3) Elder as teacher is someone you go to when you need advice
 - b. When we are choosing elders, remember we are choosing teachers

III. Second, Elders Must Be Good Examples of Christian Living

A. Paul's words in **Titus 1** emphasize this role of elders in a different way.

1. Titus was left on the island of Crete was to finish a hard job (**1:5**)
⁵ The 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.
 - a. That is the background for the list of qualities for elders (**verses 6-9**)
 - 1) Part Titus's job as evangelist on Crete was appointing elders.
 - 2) Paul gives a detailed list of the kind of qualities Titus should seek.
 - b. And the last of those qualities mentioned is again teaching (**1:9**)
⁹ 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.
 - c. This transitions to warning about false teachers on Crete (**1:10**)
¹⁰ For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group.
2. The list of those qualities for elders is the **opposite** of false teachers!
 - a. Elders hold firmly the message (**9**); others taught what should not (**11**).
 - b. Elders don't pursue dishonest gain (**9**); false teachers did just that (**11**)
 - c. Elders are not given to drunkenness (**7**); false teacher were so given (**12**)
 - d. Elder were to be blameless (**7**); others were disobedient and unfit (**16**);
3. The qualities of elders and threat of false teachers overlay perfectly here.
 - a. The men Titus appointed as shepherds completed his work in Crete.
 - b. Their character, influence and service reflected the true Christian life.

B. We should see the men we select as elders as model of the Christian faith

1. Their lives and their examples should point to Christ and Christianity.
 - a. Obviously, that doesn't mean perfection—only one Perfect life!
 - b. Elders should be men who character and life are examples to follow.
2. What we call "*qualifications*" are really qualities of character (**1 Tim 3:2-3**)
An overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.
 - a. This is look under the hood, outward things pointing to man's character
 - 1) There are other character pointers not on list—loving, kind, patient
 - 2) **Carol Osborne**: In Arkansas, elders must take care of hunting dogs!
 - b. When choosing elders, remember that you are choosing examples

IV. Third, Elders Must Be Shepherds

A. Paul spoke of “*elders who direct the affairs of the church*” (**1 Tim 5:17**).

1. That sounds like elders are management. NASB has “*elders who rule well.*”

a. Both may imply something too structured and organization focused

b. NET has “*Elders who provide effective leadership.*” But what kind?

2. This becomes plain when we look at Paul’s statement in **1 Timothy 3:5**

If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?

a. We may think of “*manage*” in terms of program, budgets, facility, etc

b. But what is managed here? *Family*. He leads and cares for people!

1) When Paul says elders “*take care of*” the church, he means people!

2) Other time this word is used in of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:34**)

³⁴ *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.*

c. Elders don’t manage institutions; their ministry is to focus on folks!

B. When we pray for our elders (as we should), what do we generally ask for?

1. “*To make good decisions.*” May see elders as primarily decision-makers.

a. They decide on things like programs, property, personnel, principal.

b. Actually elders can delegate all of those things (*CPA can do budget!*)

2. The main job of a shepherd is to care for and to feed the sheep.

a. Sure, decisions must be made, but that the primary task of elders!

b. Notice what James says about elders & church management (**James 5:14**)

⁴ *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.*

V. Conclusion

A. Choosing elders is hiring a church administrator or a business manager

1. Those tasks are important, but they can easily be turned over to others

2. Elders are the teachers, examples of holiness and spiritual care-givers

B. We’ll talk more Wednesday night the qualities that equip men to serve (*be there*)

1. Widows were to have certain qualities for church to “*enroll*” (**1 Tim 5:9-10**)

faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds

2. Sounds a lot like the list for elders. Why? Things we should all be doing!