

# LESSON SEVEN

## LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNMENT: The Shepherds and the Flock

*"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God..." (Acts 20:28).*

### DAY 1: READ & SUMMARIZE

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The following verses encapsulate the lesson to follow. Read them carefully, meditating on their message. Express the key concept of each passage as it applies to local church government.

A) 1 Timothy 3:1-13 –

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B) 1 Timothy 5:1-20 –

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C) Titus 1:5-16 –

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D) 1 Peter 5:1-4 –

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### INTRODUCTION

The New Testament design for local church governance is simple but adequate. It has survived through fierce persecution and internal struggle. And yet there is no use pretending about the challenges of a local church led by elder rule. It isn't easy being an elder at any time—but especially when the sheep misbehave. And dangers lurk on every hand—hirelings who flee at first sign of danger; wolves on the prowl; thieves and robbers; and, most surprising, “men of your own selves speaking perverse things.” On top of that the demands on your time and energy, the loneliness of “the care of the churches,” the sometimes unreasonable standards to which you and your family are held, and the constant need for prayer, Bible study, visitation and discipling. And then there is the criticism and second guessing of every decision. And the thanks of the assembly? Better wait for the Lord's smile. No, it isn't easy being an elder. Sometimes you wonder if it's worth it.

But then, this the Lord's idea, isn't it...

It isn't easy being one of the sheep, either. Sometimes it seems the elders are too busy to care. They often make decisions that affect our lives without hearing our concerns. Some assemblies suffer under a despotic man who rides the sheep hard and doesn't listen to his fellow elders. What can one little sheep do? You pray and pray, but little seems to change. Sometimes you wonder if it's worth it. But then...

### SOME GENERAL STATEMENTS TO BEGIN:

- 1. The Lord knew He was putting us all in vulnerable positions when He designed the church the way He did.** He is all-wise and nowhere in Scripture does He make apology for the way things were designed.
- 2. The people in your local church are not perfect, but then neither are you.** This isn't the end

of the story; it is the middle of the process. The Lord designed the local church to keep us dependent on Him, to minimize the glory of man and to keep us humbly seeking His throne in every time of need.

**3. It is in difficult times...** that we find out if we really believe in the true Headship of Christ, or look to our own resources to try and solve the problems.

**4. Even a difficult assembly can be a good school.** For in this situation, we can learn the grace, patience, and meekness that will, if we learn from the experiences, make us like the Lord Jesus.

### THE DEFINITION OF AN ELDER

There are three words used for those who care for a local church (note that elders are always found in the plural):

1. elder, *presbuteros*, used for age, rank or office, but emphasizes his *maturity* and fitness for the role

2. bishop, *episkopos*, better translated an overseer, emphasizes his solemn *responsibility*

3. shepherd, *poimen*, one who cares for the flock, illustrates his *function*, to feed, lead, and take heed

**Please note:** Titus 1:5, 7 demonstrates the elder and bishop speaks of the same person; 1 Peter 5:1-4 shows the same for elder and shepherd. Only ecclesiastical bias caused the distinctions we see among the prelacy today.

### THE DESIGN OF ELDER RULE

**1. The elders are always seen in plurality in the New Testament.** In addition, elder rule is never seen in conjunction with a pastor or clergyman presiding over them. This makes true elder rule impossible.

**2. The sharing of the oversight of the local church means that the elders are humble, servant men who do not want their own will,**

**do not have a private agenda.** They believe the strength of the biblical design is that *“in the multitude of counsellors there is safety”* (Prov 11:14). However they recognize there is a variety of gift and learn to appreciate the various abilities they share together in the eldership.

**3. Only male leadership is countenanced in Scripture.** This matter is fully discussed in Lesson 9.

**4. Fellowship in the local church involves not only the embracing of the privileges and responsibilities there, but also a willingness to submit to the oversight of that assembly.** The elders recognize they have no jurisdiction outside of assembly life and act as loving fathers, not *“as being lording it over God’s heritage”* (1 Pet 5:3).

### **THE ELDERS’ QUALIFICATIONS**

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7. There are two extremes to be avoided in this regard. One is to make too little of these qualifications, sug-

gesting that the list is unreasonable and something only to be aimed at. But the word *“must”* in v 2 means *“is bound to be”* these things. The other extreme is to make the description one of perfection. There are perfect elders—unfortunately they are all in heaven! In fact, the list is not unreasonable. Since elders are to be examples to us, all believers should live this way. But elders must fulfill these requirements.

These requirements are given in grace. For example, a man having serious trouble with his family neither has the time nor the heart to be helping other families with their struggles. Of course every elder will have challenges with his own family; otherwise he will be of little help to those who do. But it does mean that his wife recognizes his God-given authority and his children learn to submit to him because of his consistent life and moral suasion. If he cannot look after his own family, the Lord says, *“I don’t want him trying to care for My family.”*

One more thing we should note: The phrase “office of a bishop” is in fact better translated “work of an overseer.” Woe betides the man who has a lust for office, who thinks that an elder is someone who meets every so often to make a few decisions for the assembly, and then carries on with his life. When the Scripture says, “*we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 Jn 3:16), that is exactly what it means. It is what that Great Shepherd of the sheep did, and it is expected of the under-shepherds as well.

Now notice the specific qualifications mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:

**1. FAMILIAL Qualifications:** “*husband of one wife*” or lit., a one-woman man, i.e., loyal to his vows; he must be serious, watchful, and hospitable; also “*one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)*” (1 Tim 3:4-5).

**2. SOCIAL Qualifications:** “*Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil*” (v 7). A man who lives a double life plays into the devil’s hands. The elder must be above scandal in business and in the community, avoiding even the appearance of evil.

**3. MORAL Qualifications:** “*not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous*” (v 3). How can he be soon angry and patiently care for God’s lambs? No hot-tempered elders, please!

**4. DOCTRINAL Qualifications:** the words “apt to teach” means that the elder takes his Bible seriously and spends time studying it to help God’s people. The verse does not say that he must do this from the podium; he may instead be a help to young Christians, the widows and shut-ins, or couples.

**5. DEVELOPMENTAL Qualifications:** *“not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil”* (v. 6). It is no kindness to put someone in the forefront who has not yet learned to resist the devil in the faith. We are setting him up for a fall. However, some see in this verse the necessity of long decades of preparation for eldership. To some degree this qualification would be variable. A man who qualified to be an elder over the young Christians in Thessalonica would not necessarily qualify at the assembly in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it seems that Paul took less than two years for the development of every elder he disciplined. And he was starting in many cases with raw pagans! You can be sure those candidates for elder were not wasting any time!

### **THE ELDERS’ RESPONSIBILITIES**

- *“to feed the flock of God”* with good and nourishing food from God’s Word (1 Pet 5:2)
- protect the assembly from false teachers (Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:9-11)
- care for the sick, especially those who also need spiritual restoration (Jas 5:14)
- to guide the assembly both by godly example and by biblical precept
- to disciple other believers

### **DISCIPLING YOUNGER BELIEVERS**

Disciple-making is the Lord’s design. And it is the need of the hour! We will convince no one that we are New Testament assemblies if we are not engaged in this vital work. Why?

**1. Because it is the express will of God.** *“Go ye therefore, and [make disciples of] all nations...”* (Mt 28:19). You say you have no younger believers to disciple in your assembly? Start with the unbelievers around you—of which there is no shortage. Disciple

making begins with the gospel, not merely arranging a gospel meeting but going to the lost with this wonderful news, as our verse commands.

**2. Because it is the only way to accomplish the Great Commission.**

It cannot be accomplished through the work of a few preachers. The Lord designed the project so everyone could be involved. If you feel there are many things you cannot teach young Christians, surely there are some things you can teach. Can you show them how to pray for the lost, how to be hospitable, how to use a concordance? Can you introduce them to a good book, or to a divine principle which has transformed your life? Then by God's grace, do that.

**3. Because it is the way to lay a sure foundation for the next generation.**

Of course we should live in the daily hope of the Lord's return. However, He may wait a little longer (2 Pet 3:9). How will you personally have prepared your

young believers for such an eventuality? Is your generation passing on the sacred treasures which previous generations entrusted to you? As Paul enjoined Timothy, *"The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also"* (2 Tim 2:2).

In disciple-making there is the need for regular close contact. We will not rub them the wrong way if they know we are interested in their good. This is often difficult for an older Christian—to make oneself available, to be both transparently honest and gently caring, to be forgiving with our young charges when they fail. If this is not handled properly, it may be the last we see of our young people.

Notice the two reasons for the Lord gathering disciples: *"And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that he might send them forth..."* (Mk 3:14). Here is the secret. If we can hon-

estly convince young believers that, with all their faults and immaturity, we want to spend time with them, and if they know we see potential in them for God, we will have won their loyalty. Just spending time—happy times, hard times, times in the Word, in prayer, in visiting, at the table, in the work—this is the investment that pays rich dividends.

You say you are too busy? More busy than the Lord Jesus? Then you are indeed too busy. But this is the beauty of the plan. Carry on with your life and ministry—but take young believers with you. It may be awkward at first, but keep it up and you will find not only that the young people will benefit; you will benefit. You will catch some of their enthusiasm, the freshness of their enjoyment of truths new to them. You will find encouragement in their progress, and gain new strength given by heaven to accomplish this ministry.

What would we like young con-

verts to become? In other words, what are the spiritual skills we would like our disciples to acquire and how will we teach them these things? Here are a few suggestions.

### **1. To be servants (Mt 20:25-28).**

In the world, the more servants you have the greater you are. But in the Church it is just the opposite. The Lord said, *“So shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister...”* (Mk 10:43). Most churches in Christendom have paid servants or ministers, and are designed for people who want to be served. But the original design was that everyone was to be a minister. The Lord wants to maximize the sacrifice in order to maximize the blessing. Teaching our young people by example how to be servants could be the greatest thing we do for them.

### **2. To be stewards (Lk 12:42).**

The Lord Jesus did not call us bondslaves, but He did call us stew-



ards. As such, every young believer must learn how to handle the Lord's possessions. Their bodies are not their own, but temples of God's Spirit. Their material possessions are borrowed and will have to be accounted for: *"As having nothing, and yet possessing all things"* (2 Cor 6:10). The use of their time is also a sacred trust, and will appear for final audit at the Bema.

**3. To be witnesses (Acts 1:8).**

How strange to see a farmer throw one seed here today, another there tomorrow. He would soon be out of business. And are we teaching our young people that a tract left at the restaurant, a casual word here and there, is God's idea of evangelism? The three pictures of evangelism in the New Testament—farming, fishing, and fighting—are all high risk, high energy endeavors. We need to teach young believers the essentials of the gospel, the critical role of prayer and the Spirit's guidance, the skills necessary to win souls for Christ, and

the hard work it entails. The New Testament does not treat evangelism as a hobby, nor should we.

**4. To be students (2 Tim 2:15; Jn 8:31).**

Diligence in studying the Word should be taught, not learned by the hit-or-miss method. Unfortunately many older Christians were not taught how to study their Bibles, especially women—as if the study of the Word is a men-only activity. This may mean swallowing some humble pie by telling your understudy that you were not taught good study methods but "How would it be if we learn together?" It could be the beginning of a rich time discovering truth for yourself rather than living off commentary tidbits or hand-me-down truth from others. Teaching a young believer to rightly divide the Word is of lifelong benefit to himself and to others, protecting from error, preserving from sin, and equipping for service (1 Tim 4:16).

### **5. To be warriors (2 Tim 2:3-4).**

Surely this is vital in a day when many believers are falling in battle. There must be a willingness to submit to authority, to take correction, to be accountable. One must learn how to put on the armor, how to wield the Spirit's sword, how to battle on our knees in prayer. We must warn our young people about the dangers of premarital intimacy, internet pornography, social drinking, rampant materialism, and other wiles of the devil. But we must also provide wholesome alternatives to give them opportunity to enjoy the company of other godly young people, to labor and learn together in the work of the Lord.

### **6. To be fruit-bearers (Jn 15:8).**

What we are is more important than what we do. Your young people need to understand that what we want for them more than anything else is to be Christlike. This will involve time alone with the Lord, being wholehearted in our obedience to His Lordship, and allowing the heavenly Gar-

dener to prune us all that we might bear "much fruit" and that our fruit "might remain."

### **THE RESPONSE OF THE FLOCK TO THE SHEPHERDS**

**1. We should "obey" them (Heb 13:17).** This means we should take the initiative to know how they were saved, their favorite books, and how best you can encourage them. Elders should visit God's people but we should visit them too.

**2. We should "esteem them...for their work's sake" (1 Thess 5:13).** Some day they will give account for our souls. We want them to do it with joy. And it couldn't hurt to encourage them, too!

**3. We should follow their faith (13:7).** All men have failures. You wouldn't follow Moses in his marriage relationship or David in the way he raised his boys. But surely you can follow them in the ways they were faithful (read Hebrews 11 if you forget—even Samson and Jephthah had some area of faithfulness you can follow).

SEE p 114 FOR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**4. We should pray for them.** If we used our criticism times for prayer times, what a difference it would make. In fact, we are not even to listen to an unsubstantiated criticism of them (1 Tim 5:19).

**5. We should entreat them as fathers (1 Tim 5:1).** If there is some matter to discuss with them, be gracious. Make your words sweet. You will never regret being kind.

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**Review:**

1. Which of the struggles that an elder faces have you observed or been aware of?

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2. What is the difference in meaning between the three words for elder?

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3. Is there an area in your life that you demonstrate disobedience to the elders' authority?

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4. What is "the investment that pays rich dividends"?

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5. Fill in the blanks from the notes: Teaching our young people by example how to be \_\_\_\_\_ could be the greatest thing we do for them.

6. What are the 3 pictures of evangelism in the NT and in what two ways are they similar?

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## DAY 3: WATCH & ANSWER

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Fill in the blanks as you watch the video. TIP: It's helpful to pre-read the questions before watching. You can check the answers in the Answer Key (Appendix 10).

### Introduction:

1. Church government as outlined in the New Testament is ,  and .
2. Three words describing servants: ,  (responsible for another man's goods), and .
3. Elders are  by God and He selects them; deacons are stewards  by the local fellowship for their dependability, and faithfulness.

### General statements:

In difficult church circumstances, God has given us a secret weapon, resources to make us more Christ-like, to purify us, to allow us to be overcomers. It is this:

"  ."

### Definition of an Elder

1. The idea of being an elder is not a matter of old age, but of .
2. Every elder  be a shepherd, but not every shepherd is an elder.

### Design of Elder Rule

1. Elders are not to rule the people of God with a heavy hand. By moral , by godly , and careful  of the Word of God, they encourage people to respond to God the Father.
2. Elder rule is not despotic but neither is it , nor a dereliction of duty. If we love the Shepherd, we will love what the Shepherd loves – the sheep.
3. An essential addition to the privileges and responsibilities of church fellowship is the  to the oversight of that assembly. Elders cannot have responsibility without .

### Elders' Qualifications

1. These are the  requirements for an elder
2. The children of an elder do not need to be perfect, but they must recognize him as a .
3. The wife and children of an elder will come under special  by the enemy. They need our prayers.

### The elders' responsibilities

1. They must teach the whole counsel of God. Simply put, good food is good  to keep from having a lot of sick sheep.

2. Elders do not control, dictate or have authority over .

The husband is the head of the home.

3. Elders recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in people and commend people, not to the work, but to the .

### Discipline younger believers

We have no time to waste. We should be actively engaged in passing on the truth in  to the next generation - the way we received it.

### Response of the flock

1. It is the responsibility of the people of God to  their shepherds, to follow their faith.

2. Don't accentuate their . Let them know you appreciate and esteem them.

## QUESTIONS

### FOR DISCUSSION...

1. What are ways, seen in Scripture, that we can make a bigger impact on assisting the elders?

2. How do elders and deacons fit within the overall purpose of the Church?

**General Notes for the Video Lesson**

Lined area for taking notes.

## DAY 4: WRITE & REMEMBER

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1. Record three significant statements from this chapter. Why are they significant to you?

A) **Statement One:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B) **Statement Two:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

C) **Statement Three:** \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

2. Memorize 2 Timothy 2:3, 4.

## DAY 5: REFLECT & PRAY

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Respond in prayer: Having looked carefully at God's simple and sufficient design for local church government, reflect on your own life in the following ways:

**Praise:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Repent:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ask:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Yield:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAISE:** What specific blessing have you discovered in this lesson? Thank the Lord for it! **REPENT:** Is there something in your life that is hindering you from experiencing what you have just learned? **ASK:** What specific way would you like the Lord to help you live out these truths? **YIELD:** Is there a particular area in your life that needs to come under the Lord's rule?