

Studies in Church Leadership: Lesson Two:
Elders Are What is Best for a Congregation

I. In our first lesson on the subject of Elders there only one, very simple, point that we wished to make: God's desire for Elders in a local church is not optional: It is something that He wants accomplished in every congregation, and as such every congregation must be actively working towards it.

A. The way that we went about this was by taking note that the subject of Elders is not confined to a couple of chapters from 1 Timothy and Titus; but rather is a subject that is given instruction on in multiple places, and can be seen as a part of functioning congregations in multiple places. --In other words, the only reason that one could have for not actively pursuing the appointment of Elders is to ignore a great many New Testament passages.

1. And while it may seem that this point is self-evident, the complete departure from scriptural Elderships in the religious world, and the widespread neglect of them in many Churches would say otherwise.

B. **But where** we ended last week was by taking note that while the fact that God has commanded us to do something should be enough motivation in and of itself, we have the added benefit of knowing that His commands are always for our benefit and in our best interest.

1. One extremely visible place this can be seen is in appointing good spiritual leaders to guide the flock; The difference between a congregation that is united under the leadership of Godly men serving as Elders and a group that has either neglected that pursuit or, perhaps even worse appointed unqualified men as leaders, is the difference between daylight and dark.

2. Our goal for tonight is again going to be relatively simple: I want us to take the time to look at a few different examples poor leadership in scripture, and make the observation that in contrast to how God's people flourish under Godly shepherds, when they are led by wicked men, they stumble and falter, ceasing to grow in the path of the Lord.

I. The Consequences of Poor Leadership:

A. *As seen in the prophets:*

1. One of the recurring themes that runs through the Prophets is God's denouncement of the spiritual leaders of Israel. They had failed to keep God's charge in guiding Israel in the way of the Lord, and because of their failure, the majority of God's flock would be destroyed-- scattered, killed, led into captivity, with only a small portion to return. The great tragedy of this is that it was not that Israel accidentally stumbled into this fate, but that God's people were led in this path:
2. There are several passages that describe God's anger towards these unacceptable leaders, but I want for us to take a look at a couple of the more well known accounts:

a) **Read: Ezekiel 34:1-6**

b) Similarly in Jeremiah 23:1-2

(1) Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: "You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds," declares the Lord. (reading on in the prophets who gave false messages of comfort are condemned as well)

- c) Everywhere both nations, Israel and Judah, looked for much of their existence as a nation, their leadership was twisted and corrupt. Those who should have fed the flocks, we instead found to be feeding on the flock:
3. One might very well make the argument that with such distorted and vulgar shepherds like these to follow, that there is no way that God could/should/would hold the sheep accountable for being led astray: Its not their fault! They didn't ask for these kinds of leaders!
 - a) There is one **BIG** problem with this however: After a while bad leaders create bad followers: **Jeremiah 5:29-31 Illustrates**

- (1) **It might** be hard for you to imagine God's people being described that way; in essence, they are shepherded by evil twisted men on a pathway to destruction and they love it that way!
- (2) But that is exactly what happened to the nation, and even after returning from captivity, this tendency remained in God's people: This point is further Illustrated in **Zechariah 11**
- (a) In verse 4 God calls his people flock who is doomed to be slaughtered.
- (b) In Summary, the prophet Zechariah is told that he is to have a thankless job. He is to act as a shepherd of the people in some official capacity, as a representative of God before His people-- *Something they should rejoice over*
- i) However, Zechariah's service to the people is rejected: They state in no uncertain terms that they don't want him, and they think that his service was worthless: They would rather have the shepherds who don't look after them, who don't heal the broken, who eat them instead of feeding them-- The chapter ends with God stating that is exactly what He will give them!
- (c) This chapter is an excellent place to illustrate the sometimes irreparable damage that bad spiritual leaders can cause on the flock; very often leading them so far down the wrong path that they are incapable of turning back.

B. As Seen in Other Places:

1. The prophets are hardly the only place that one can see the consequences of poor leadership:
 - a) Looking in Exodus 32, you can see the consequences of Aaron's weak willed leadership of the people; creating the Golden Calf and leading to the death of many Israelites
 - b) Our recent studies in 1 Samuel gave one example after another of how God's people suffered and stumbled under first the poor leadership of Eli and his sons Hophni and Phinehas, and then later under the bitter and vindictive King Saul.

- c) When the kingdoms divided, Israel to the North had not one single King that is described as being faithful to the Lord: It is worth noting that they were destroyed and carried away well over a hundred years before God punished Judah, who at least had the benefit of a few Godly leaders.
- d) The list continues on through the Old Testament and marches right on up to the religious leaders in Jesus day
 - (1) But something else that we've mentioned is that it isn't always poor leadership that causes God's people to suffer; sometimes there is equal amounts of disaster because God's people choose to neglect the concept of leadership altogether.

II. Consequences of NO Leaders; As Seen in the Judges:

- A. Most are familiar with the "theme verse" as it were in the book of Judges" In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
 - 1. What exactly was it like among God's people, when everyone just did what they thought was best?
 - a) Somewhere around 12 times in the book of Judges, the people had no leader. 12 times the individual who had lead them in peace and a return to God's will passed on, and a total of 12 times there was a great apostasy that took place in the void that was left by their good spiritual leadership:
 - b) The consequences of the leadership void are shocking by any standards:
 - (1) They abandoned the worship of God for wholesale Idolatry, even fighting with each other and assembling for war over objects of false religion (Judges 18)
 - (2) ch. 19 records the horror of the Levities concubine being raped and murdered, and the callousness of the Levite toward the situation
 - (3) An entire tribe is almost completely destroyed when the nation sought to punish those responsible: Civil War ensued, leaving only 600 men in the tribe of Benjamin.
 - (4) The book of Judges illustrates like no other place, that left without leadership, Chaos ensues.

Conclusion:

- We've really eliminated all of the alternatives haven't we:
- If God's people suffer when there are bad leaders in place, and if they suffer when there are no leaders in place, we are only left with one option.
- We've seen the tragedy and heartache that unfold when Good Shepherds of the flock are not in place; but just as we said when we began, the difference that those leaders can make is incredible:
- IN our next few lessons we are going to be looking at the work that God has charged Elders with carrying out: as we do that we will be looking at some Biblical examples of GOOD leaders that help to illustrate those points. I look forward to these studies.