

## **Studies in Church Leadership: *Discussion 3***

### ***The Elder as a Watchman***

**I. Imagine if you will** that there is a position of the utmost importance that needs to be filled: For our purposes let's suppose that the local Nuclear Power station is in need of a team of specialists to monitor the Nuclear Reactor: They'll need to be able to monitor it closely, adjust the levels if need be, and in case of an emergency shut the reactor down altogether. The candidates are vetted, and a very lengthy list of qualifications as to who can be on this team is stringently poured over to make sure that no one is placed in this position who is unqualified for the task. Finally, a few technicians have gained your confidence and so they are installed into this very vital task.

A. However, once they are at their station, one of them spends all of his time balancing the pay role for the other workers at the Plant. Another spends his time making sure that the proper cleaning supplies are kept in stock for the janitorial service. Still another spends his efforts on making sure nobody parks in the wrong parking zones outside:

1. Are these important tasks? Do they need to get done? Certainly; the only problem is that they are not the tasks that this team was assembled for. While they spend their time on these things, the reactor is left unattended, and will eventually reach critical mass.

B. **This scenario** is obviously farfetched, and we would be hard pressed to truly imagine it happening. But in reality, this is the situation that many churches are in when it comes to selecting their elders:

1. There is a great deal of time spent on pouring through the qualifications as listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but very little time is spent on considering the actual work that these men are being qualified to do!

2. Whether it be the congregation who is expecting certain tasks of the Elders, or the Elders who are choosing to focus on them, there are often men who "strictly speaking" meet the qualifications of being an Elder, but focus their energy on efforts that are not part of what God has called them to do.

C. **Our task** then will be to examine over the next few lessons the work that God has called these men to do. And after having a firm grasp of what that work is, move into seeing if men are qualified to do it or not.

## II. Consider the Text of Ezekiel 33:1-9

A. One of the ways that God has described leaders of His people is as Watchmen. It may be a single person like Moses, Joshua, or one of the Judges, or it may be a group of men like with the scribes and the priests.

1. But one of the ways that God held them accountable as leaders was from the perspective of “**Watchmen**”: Were the fulfilling the duty of one set on watch: To warn of incoming danger, to sound the alarm when needed, to look out and let others know if they were straying off of the path that they were to be on.
2. In the text that we just read, Ezekiel was given such a charge from God: It was a *serious* mission. He was to sound the alarm and warn those who were in error, to let them know that their very lives were at stake!

B. This task is still a great necessity for God’s people; to have leaders who will serve as the Watchmen on the Wall: God has planed out to provide such men:

1. As the inspired writer is giving his closing exhortations to the Christian brethren in Hebrews, in the context of doing that which pleases God, he has this to say about Elders: *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.* - Hebrews 13:17
2. It was an important job in Ezekiel’s day, and it still is today: And acting as a watchmen over spiritual Israel is a primary part of the work of an Elder:

## III. What Do They Watch For?

A. Take a moment to read **1 Peter 5:1-2**

1. I want us to take a moment to discuss this term “oversee”
  - a) It is certainly a term that establishes the office of an Elder as one with authority, but what exactly is the task that they are to carry out with this Authority?

- b) The word does not simply mean one who is in charge of looking after things: It means to look after something with great diligence; It is a term that implies that you are looking after something in order to care for it:
- 2. Serving as a watchmen or an overseer means that the Elder will have to look after and care for many aspects of the congregation:
  - a) Included in this would be all of the activities that a local church is to engage in:
    - (1)As watchmen they will have to pay close attention to the teaching that is being done in the congregation; The preaching, the adult classes, what is being taught in the other classes, they will closely inspect it, watching to make sure it is keeping the group on the path they need to be on, and sounding the alarm when it isn't
    - (2) They will inspect whether or not we are wisely using the Lord's money, and if we are using it to accomplish what we've been instructed to do with it.
    - (3)Whatever work is being done, as overseers they will have to give extreme diligence to make sure that it is being carried out according to scripture, and in a way that is spurring the growth of the group
  - b) As a watchman, Elders will be keeping watch even over what individual members are doing:
    - (1)They will watch to see if this member of the body is functioning as it should, and existing in harmony with other members
    - (2)Again, if one is straying from the path, they must sound the alarm and guide them back
  - c) In order to exercise oversight in all of these matters as well as others, they will have to be very well informed as to what is going on in the church; they will have to be very involved!

B. **Let's take note of** some of the instructions that Paul gave to the Ephesian Elders on this subject: **Acts 20:28-30**

- I. Elders, must keep **Watch Over Themselves too!**
  - a) Does it shock you to think about Paul warning the Elders that from among themselves there would arise men that would harm the flock?

(1) It shouldn't come as a surprise: If you take time to examine "Church" history, the greatest apostasies have grown from the seeds of a corrupted Eldership:

(2) We saw in Hebrews 13 that Christians are instructed to follow the example of their Elders; this is why it is so important for Elders to be faithful in their example in teaching: When error exists among the elders, many times the congregation follows, often without question.

b) Elders must keep watch over themselves:

(1) A good amount of time should be devoted to this: The example of the leaders will influence the church one way or another, whether it is for good or for bad.

(2) Elders must ask themselves if they are acting as examples in all areas of the faith; are they walking the path they want others to follow down:

## 2. **Elders are instructed to Watch for wolves:**

a) Part of what Elders are to keep watch for are the different influences that the congregation is being exposed to:

(1) Sometimes that might be a threat that is likened to a dangerous animal, and they must keep watch for those that would devour the flock:

(a) This may be false teachers, it might be trends in the world, it might be members who are not existing in harmony

(b) It may come from the preaching; it might come from the teaching, or perhaps just the strong influence of a member; But they will always be looking out and ready to warn of any danger to the flock:

## 3. **Elders are to keep watch over souls:**

a) This responsibility should drive home the importance of their duties: These are souls that Christ purchased with His blood, and every one is important: AN Elder is not only responsible for watching over the needs of the group, but caring for each individual as well.

(1) That means knowing each member well enough to be familiar with their strengths and weaknesses so that they can keep watch over their spiritual health:

- (a) They are watching for any sign of danger: loss of interest, divisions, dissatisfaction, lack of knowledge, the loss of zeal, or even zeal for the wrong things:
- (b) At any point they see a sheep straying, their duty is to turn back that soul from the path they are setting out on
- b) The elder does this because Hebrews says that they must give account for the souls that are watching over:
  - (i) This is a solemn charge, and the Watchman must strive to be able to say that any souls that were lost, were not lost because of neglect!

#### IV. **What does it take to be a watchman?**

- A. This is a great responsibility! It must not be given to someone who has not had the years that bring training and experience:
  - i. It does not hold true that someone who has been a Christian for many years has been training their eyes to Watch:
    - a) If a man has not been in the practice of taking an interest in what is going on in the local church, or has not made a practice to be involved and active, he doesn't have the experience to watch over the work the congregation is doing
    - b) If a man has not already been taking an interest in the spiritual state of his fellow brothers and sisters, then he doesn't have the experience to watch over them in this regard.
    - c) If he has not spent time watching over himself, and giving thought to the example that he is setting in the faith, he is not ready to "take heed to yourself" now.
- B. The question that we need to ask, is are there men among us who are showing that they have the experience to do these things? Can you look around and see men that you are willing to entrust as the Watchmen on the wall?
  - i. This is the question that we should be asking tonight, and in the weeks to come.