

“One Day, When It Is My Time To Be An Elder...”

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
December 14, 2003
AM Worship

Introduction:

Regrettably, almost the only time we preach on topics relating to elders is when we are appointing them. In that situation, we are so busy trying to think about who may be qualified that we may not stop to think about ourselves as we listen to those lessons. We think, perhaps subconsciously, “I will never be an elder, so this does not apply to me. I wonder who we have that is qualified.” Or perhaps we think, “One day, when it is my time to be an elder, then this will matter for me, but right now let me think about who we have that is qualified.” Today, we will look at the job and qualifications of elders, but not because we are about to appoint anyone. Rather, each of us needs to learn these lessons, whether we are young or old, male or female, nearly qualified, far from qualified or will never be qualified.

Discussion:

- I. “One day, when it is my time to be an elder, I will work on these qualifications.”
 - A. We can see the qualifications for pastors in **I Timothy 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:5-9**. We can summarize these lists by pointing out that God wants men of character, conviction and demonstrated capability. Too often the mindset when we study these qualifications is, “One day, when it is my time to be an elder, I will work on these qualifications.”
 - B. The first problem with this is—if you wait until it is your time to be an elder to work on these qualifications, then you will never be an elder. Why? Because a qualification is something you have to have prior to being an elder. This reminds me of the time at the end of my junior year in high school when I told my Dad that I had decided to go out for the high school football team. I remember sitting at the dinner table as he explained why trying out for the football team my senior year would be absolutely pointless. Certainly, I had enough athletic ability to make the team. But having never worked on any useful football skill, I was not qualified to be anything more than a pounding bag in practice for the bulldozers who had been training in football for years. Come game time, I would never play.
 - C. But the most important issue is not that you have to work on these things years prior to “your time to be an elder.” The real issue is to consider who God is saying should be an overseer. Boil all the qualifications down into one sentence and you learn that God wants mature Christian men to be bishops. When we recognize that these passages describe maturity and not just elder qualifications, our mindset changes. Suddenly, these passages are no longer about someone else. They are about you and me.
 - D. Who among us is supposed to grow to maturity? Every one of us. When are we supposed to start that process? The moment we are born into Christ. **I Peter 2:2** said we should desire the milk of the word in order to grow. **II Peter 1:5-11** demonstrated that growth and increased maturity are essential to salvation. **I Corinthians 14:20** said that we are to be babes in evil but grow to maturity in understanding. The picture of the shepherd is not a picture for the few who may one day become elders. It is the goal for every one of us. (I understand that neither getting married nor having children are prerequisites to mature Christianity. However, what these passages say about the elder and his family demonstrates maturity in Christ regarding the family relationships for all who do get married and have children.)
 - E. Are we allowed to be full of blame, unholy, unjust, inhospitable, unable to teach, given to wine, covetous, quarrelsome, violent and self-willed just because we are not elders? Notice what Paul told Titus about men in general in **Titus 2:2, 6-8**. Sounds surprisingly like eldership qualifications. But what about women? Read **Titus 2:3-5** and also what Paul said regarding widows qualified to “be taken into the number” in **I Timothy 5:9-10**. These passages sound surprisingly similar to the elder’s qualifications. Maturity is essentially the same for men and women.
 - F. Maturity is the goal for all Christians. Whether being a bishop is near, far or nowhere in our future, the picture painted in Timothy and Titus should be our goal. What are you and I doing to be what is described in those verses?
- II. “One day, when it is my time to be an elder, I will do this work.”
 - A. We can learn the job of bishops from **I Peter 5:1-4**. These men are shepherds who oversee the flock of God. They are accountable for our souls. They are to guard, guide and feed the flock.

They are to strengthen the brethren, helping us get to heaven. When someone is “out of duty,” the elders deal with them. When someone is teaching error, the elders deal with them. When someone is in need, the elders deal with them. “Boy, I sure am glad I am not an elder yet. That way I do not have to deal with all of that. But don’t worry, one day, when it is my time to be an elder, I will do that work.”

- B. At times, it is almost as if those of us who are not elders see our brothers and sisters in some kind of need or having some kind of problem and we offer the spiritual equivalent to Cain’s response to God in **Genesis 4:9**, “Am I my brother’s keeper? That’s the elders’ job.” In **Galatians 6:1**, Paul taught, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one...” This passage is not directed to elders, but to the spiritual. If we do not work to restore or help our brethren, we are not declaring that we are not elders. We are declaring that we are not spiritual.
- C. **I Peter 5:2** claims the elders are overseers. The only other passage in the Bible to use the same word, “episkopeo,” for “overseer” is **Hebrews 12:15**. There it is translated “looking carefully” (NKJV). But notice that **Hebrews 12:12-17** is not directed to bishops. It is directed to Christians. Whose job is it to strengthen those with weak hands and feeble knees? The Christian’s. Whose job is it to make it easy for the brethren to go to heaven? The Christian’s. Whose job is it to make sure that none fall short of God’s grace? The Christian’s. All of us are to be doing this job now. Not waiting until some far off day when we may or may not become elders.
- D. Someone will of course ask the natural question: “If this work belongs to all Christians, why then is there an office of elder to rule, lead and shepherd the congregation?” The Bible is clear that God appointed only some to be pastors (**Ephesians 4:11**). How can we claim that this duty given to the elders applies to all? We do so in the same way that we can point out that the duty of evangelism can apply to all, even though there are some given to be evangelists (**Ephesians 4:11**). Each of us is our brother’s keeper. Each of us is responsible to strengthen the weak, restore the fallen and build up the brethren. But the office of elder is for the one whose life is given over completely to that work. Like the evangelist, some may even gain their livelihood from this office. That is not to say that they cannot work secularly. After all, Paul, the evangelist, was a tentmaker and at times he did not make his livelihood from the gospel, even though his life was devoted to evangelism (**II Thessalonians 3:8-9**). Therefore, as there are those whose lives are devoted to evangelizing and spreading the gospel, yet the responsibility of evangelism rests on all of us. Just so, there are those whose lives are devoted to keeping the flock, but the work of being our brother’s keeper belongs to each and every one of us.
- E. It is so sad to hear someone ask, “When are the elders going to do something about so and so?” If we are asking, we obviously know something about “so-and-so.” When are we going to do something about them? When are we going to exhort them, instruct them, convict them and help them get to heaven? This is our job. We must not say, “One day when I am an elder I will do this work, but right now, when are the elders going to do something about this?” What are you and I doing to accomplish this work right now?

Conclusion:

We must never be caught in the trap of thinking some day down the road we will apply Bible teaching to our lives. We may not be elders and we may never even become elders, but we must still grow to maturity and minister to one another. Do not be overwhelmed by this picture of spiritual maturity, the mere fact that God established these as qualifications means He understands the growth process of Christianity and He is patient with us. However, do not be complacent in your present spiritual status. Keep the picture of God’s shepherds as the guideline and goal of your life and spiritual growth.

What is even sadder than the statement we have been discussing is the very similar one—“One day, when I become a Christian, I will ...” I certainly am glad that God did not say, “One day, when I feel like getting around to it, I will provide for man’s salvation.” God had a plan and He implemented it, sending His Son to die for you and me. Considering His great plan, His great sacrifice and His great love, He does not deserve your devotion “one day” but today. “Behold, now is the day of salvation” (**II Corinthians 6:2**).