

February 21, 2021 Dennis Gallaher Identifying An Elder

Our job as Christians is to create a space for the King of Kings to dwell in us. We transform this space by knowing and pursuing God. **Ephesians 2:22** *In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.* The church is being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit – it's more than an individual.

I Peter 2:5 *You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* This is what it means to be in the body of Christ – that our lives collectively are being built together as a holy habitation where God can reside. We are transformed individually but also for us to find our place in the house of God. The house of God is the Church of Jesus Christ. It is the local expression of that church (the flock) that God places us for safety, for shelter, for food, and for giving and receiving care. Our identity is found in the body of Christ – the Church of Jesus Christ. The church must excel in being a place where the King resides as each life invests in the church.

A central theme of the Epistle letters is that the churches began well but then often drifted. It's the same with our individual lives. The letters are warnings to the church to not drift away from simplicity and devotion to Christ – from who we are and who we are called to be.

God establishes a safeguard, a wall of protection, in providing elders, pastors, and shepherds in the church of Jesus Christ. Freedom Fellowship Church was established around this understanding of God's government out of the New Testament. What is an elder in the body of Christ?

Paul's final words to Ephesus in **Acts 20:17** *From Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.* **Acts 20:28-32** *Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

Paul describes how important the elders are that each should have the final goal to excel at being a place where the King resides. Among the high standard of character qualities mentioned for elders, they must be men who:

- 1) Speak into the vision of the church. They do not speak “over” the vision of the pastor but are the chief counselors to the pastor's vision.
- 2) Be overseers of the church. **Titus 1:9** *holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.* An overseer of the church is a student of God's Word as the Word of God directs and initiates movement in the church. The similar picture is of a shepherd that goes above the sheep to see the dangers that are coming. Elders are stewards of the Word of God watching for the “wobbly” or false teaching, defending the Word of God.

- 3) Shepherd the flock in three ways:
 - feed the sheep the Word of God
 - protect the sheep (takes care of the 1 leaving the 99) from wolves and false doctrine
 - guide the sheep as a leader by coming alongside others to give guidance, not leaving any behind
- 4) Serve the church. It's not about business prowess or skills but elders are a part of the foundation Jesus built His church on – being servant leaders first. An elder is one who keeps the church steady and even keeled in the journey.

These characteristics create a place for the King to reside. **John 13:12** *So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? What has the Lord done for me? He takes the dirty feet soiled by the world and He personally washed them. Learn from what Jesus taught on those final hours... **John 13:13-14** You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* Jesus confirms He is "I Am": I am Teacher; I am The Lord; I am The God you serve; I am The Messiah. Jesus gave us the example to do as He did.

How do we choose elders? The church is not a business but a living body of Christ and showing the business world, arts, education, and politics that we have Christ. We are a temple, a dwelling place, and a living breathing organism created in the image of God Himself. He calls the church "My bride." We are a dwelling place where The King resides.

Being an elder is a calling of God and one will show these qualities well before being recognized as having these qualities. We recognize and affirm Matt Carpenter as a new elder for Freedom Fellowship Church. Matt and Meagan have served in many ways at Freedom for many years. We lay hands on to impart a blessing on this family and new elder of Freedom Fellowship. Thank you, Lord!

What did you learn that was new to God's governing of the church?

What is the difference between speaking over a vision or speaking counsel into a vision?

How have you drifted or seen churches drift from being who God called us to be?