

Shepherding the Church of God

Acts 20:26-32 Therefore I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of you all. (27) For I did not hold back from announcing to you the whole purpose of God. (28) Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. (29) I know that after I am gone fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. (30) Even from among your own group men will arise, teaching perversions of the truth to draw the disciples away after them. (31) Therefore, be alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears. (32) And now I entrust you to God and to the message of his grace. This message is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

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Elders are Appointed by the Holy Spirit

“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.” (Acts 20:28, NASB 1995)

“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, NASB 1995)

Key Points

Eldership is not a human election or popularity role; it's a divine appointment to guard the flock.

- The Holy Spirit makes elders overseers, implying divine trust and accountability.
- They shepherd what Christ purchased with His own blood; the highest stewardship imaginable.
- The congregation's duty is to *obey and submit* to elders who lead biblically (Heb. 13:17).

Application

- How does recognizing the Spirit's role in appointing elders change how we view their authority?
- What does it mean to “submit” when we disagree with decisions that are not sinful but uncomfortable?

Ministers Must Submit to Elders

"The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." (1 Timothy 5:17, NASB 1995)

Key Points

A preacher serves under the oversight of elders, not above them.

- "The elders who rule well" implies they *lead diligently*; ruling with Scripture, not personality.
- Ministers labor "especially in preaching and teaching" under the same accountability.
- The New Testament pattern shows evangelists like Timothy and Titus working *with* elders, not over them.

Application

- Why is it important for preachers and elders to model submission and cooperation?
- What happens when a minister resists oversight?

The Sin of Gossip and Division

"For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you." (1 Corinthians 11:19, NASB 1995)

"A perverse person spreads strife, and a slanderer separates close friends." (Proverbs 16:28, NASB 1995)

"Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned." (Titus 3:10–11, NASB 1995)

Key Points

Gossip, backbiting, and factions are spiritual cancers that destroy churches.

- Factions may arise, but they reveal who is genuine (1 Cor. 11:19).
- Gossip and slander destroy trust and unity (Prov. 16:28).
- Divisive people must be warned and, if unrepentant, rejected (Titus 3:10).

Application

- How can we lovingly correct gossip when we hear it?
- Why is silence often mistaken for kindness when it's really enabling sin?

Elders Must Lead Courageously

"For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ."
(Galatians 1:10, NASB 1995)

Key Points

Faithful shepherds must please God, not people.

- Elders face pressure to appease; but compromise kills credibility.
- Paul's words remind us that pleasing people nullifies servanthood to Christ.
- Sometimes the flock must be pruned before it grows healthy again (cf. John 15:2).

Application

- What does "courageous leadership" look like in conflict?
- How can elders strengthen one another to remain faithful?

The Church Belongs to Christ, Not Committees

"And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."
(Ephesians 1:22–23, NASB 1995)

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness."
(1 Peter 5:1–2, NASB 1995)

Key Points

Christ is the Head; the church functions through His order, not human systems.

- Christ rules the church through His Word and His appointed shepherds.
- Elders oversee; deacons serve; members follow.
- When committees or cliques take control, disorder and strife result.

Application

- What's the difference between cooperative service and unsanctioned control?
- How can members support their elders' oversight with joy rather than resistance?

A Biblical Path Forward

"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5, NASB 1995)

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." (Matthew 18:15, NASB 1995)

"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1–3, NASB 1995)

Key Points

Healing and unity come through prayer, humility, and obedience to God's Word.

- Pray and fast for wisdom (James 1:5).
- Address sin and division directly (Matt. 18:15–17).
- Pursue unity grounded in truth and love (Eph. 4:1–6).

Application

- What would reconciliation look like in this congregation?
- How can prayer and fasting renew unity?

Closing Reflection

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock... to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28, NASB 1995)

Key Point

Unity and leadership are sacred trusts, sealed by the blood of Christ. May God strengthen His shepherds to lead faithfully.

Application

Prayerful dependence - Elders seek God's guidance together.

Loving correction - Address divisive behavior quickly and biblically.

Clear communication - Teach the congregation what Scripture says about leadership.

Restoration - Focus on rebuilding peace and faith among those who remain.

The Covenant is a gift from God

For by grace are you saved through faith (not of yourselves)

Even though we must believe and have faith in Jesus, **it's not our believing faith that saves**. *It's only by the shed blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus of Nazareth, that our sins will be forgiven. And yet, without faith no man will be saved.* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Even though we must repent, that is turn from our sins, **it's not our repentance that saves us**. *It's only by the blood of God's only Son, shed at Golgotha, that our sins can be forgiven. And yet, if we do not repent, we will perish.* (Luke 13:3-5)

Even though we are commanded to be baptized, **it's not our baptism that saves us**. *It's only by the blood of the Messiah, who has defeated sin and death. And yet, without baptism no one will 'washed in the blood' and enter a Covenant Relationship with God.* (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:1-14)

- Why is there such debate about "exactly when is a person saved"?
- What is the "Biblical Plan of Salvation" and the importance that baptism plays in it?
- Did anyone in Apostolic Days ever admonish another to be "saved" by "saying a Sinner's Prayer"?
- What is the specific reason and purpose of baptism?
- What is the significance of being baptized in the Name of Yeshua of Nazareth?
- What are certain objections to the necessity of baptism?
- Why it is that we are commanded to obey a "water" baptism and not a "spirit" baptism?

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; (9) it is not from works, so that no one can boast.

Luk 13:3-5 No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you will all perish as well! (4) Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them, do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? (5) No, I tell you! But unless you repent you will all perish as well!"

Mar 16:16 The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned.

Act 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

1Pe 3:21 And this prefigured baptism, which now saves you – not the washing off of physical dirt but the pledge of a good conscience to God – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

The Gospel centers on the restoration of relationship with God, accomplished through Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

- **John 17:3** : "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."
- Defines eternal life as knowing God personally and relationally.
- **John 14:16-17** : "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."
- Speaks of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence, a vital part of the believer's union with God.
- **2 Corinthians 5:17-18** : "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ."
- Highlights the transformative power of the Gospel, reconciling believers to God.

The Spiritual Man – A New Creation

1 Cor. 2:6-16; 2 Cor. 5:16-21; Galatians 5; Romans 8

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Cor. 5:17)

How to be Right with God...

If anyone says 'I love God' and yet hates his fellow Christian, he is a liar because the one who does not love his fellow Christian whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And the commandment we have from Him is this: that the one who loves God should love his fellow Christian too. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been fathered by God, and everyone who loves the Father loves the child fathered by Him. **By this we know that we love the children of God: whenever we love God and obey His commandments.** For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments. And His commandments do not weigh us down, because everyone who has been fathered by God **overcomes** the world."

1 John 4:20 – 5:4

When Paul lists the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22–23)—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—he's describing the character and conduct that flow out of a life yielded to God's Spirit. Although the explicit phrase "Holy Spirit" appears less frequently in the Old Testament, several psalms not only point to "living the good life" (i.e., walking in covenant faithfulness and blessing) but also reference or imply the work of God's Spirit in shaping that life.

In Jeremiah 31:31–34, God promises a "new covenant" in which **His law will be written on people's hearts**, and as a result, "**they shall all know me.**" This new covenant relationship implies an intimate, personal knowledge of God rather than a merely external or secondhand acquaintance. To understand how one can know they truly "know the LORD," it's helpful to consider several biblical principles that clarify the nature and evidence of this relationship.

1. An Internal, Heart-Level Knowledge:

Under the new covenant, God's law is not just a set of external rules; it is internalized. This indicates that truly knowing the LORD involves a changed heart—a shift from merely following religious observances to experiencing a genuine inward transformation (Jeremiah 31:33). Thus, **one sign of knowing the Lord is the deep, inner desire to love, honor, and please Him, not because of external pressure, but because one's heart has been made new.**

2. A Personal Relationship Through Christ:

The New Testament reveals that **Jesus Christ mediates this new covenant**. Through faith in Christ's death and resurrection, believers enter into a restored relationship with God (Hebrews 8:6–12, John 14:6). Knowing the Lord, then, is inseparable from **knowing Christ**. If you have placed your trust in Jesus, believing His sacrifice for your sins, and have become His disciple, **this faith relationship is a foundational indicator that you know God.**

3. Obedience as a Sign of Knowledge:

First John gives practical tests for knowing God:

1 John 2:3–6: Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

4. Love as the Outflow of Knowing God:

Another test of knowing the Lord is found in love.

1 John 4:7–12 : Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

5. The Witness of the Holy Spirit:

Under the new covenant, God's Spirit dwells within believers:

Romans 8:12–17 : Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." **The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.