



Pastoral Oversight: Church Practices Series

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Pastoral Oversight

Introduction

Pastoral oversight is a very misunderstood practice in most churches. In many it is a forgotten practice and in others it is so invasive in the life of the congregation that they cannot make a decision without the permission of the “shepherd” of the flock. The Bible lays out very clear guidance related to pastoral oversight as to what must be done, who is responsible for it, and in what manner it is to be done. The Bible is equally silent as to the specific form or process in which pastoral oversight must be done. In this lesson we will look at:

- The mandate of oversight
- The heart of the overseer,
- The goal of oversight, and
- The task of oversight

The Mandate of Oversight

From the very inception of the church, God has mandated that there are those that must oversee the church. Peter was given a mandate by Jesus to feed and oversee the congregation.

- NAB John 21:15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "**Tend My lambs.**" 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "**Shepherd My sheep.**" 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "**Tend My sheep.**"
 - Tend My lambs (bosko muo arnion) – to provide food or spiritual guidance for the lambs (young believers).
 - Shepherd My sheep (poimaino mou probaton) – to feed or oversee the flock (congregation).
 - Tend My sheep (bosko mou probaton) – to provide food or spiritual guidance for the flock (congregation).

Peter passes on this mandate to the Elders towards the end of his life. Just as Paul instructs Timothy, Peter instructs the Elders of the church that they are to tend the flock.

- NAB 1 Peter 5:1 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, **2 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; **3** nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. **4** And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

God has clearly left the function of overseeing the flock to the Elders of the church. Naturally, this is not done in a vacuum, or without help, but it is their responsibility. In this congregation, men that are aspiring leaders will be involved in some oversight situations as part of their training and testing. The Elders are still responsible for the overall oversight of the church. It is also important to remember that the congregation has responsibilities in overseeing one another. These responsibilities have already been covered in previous discussions and are not addressed in this lesson.

The Heart of the Overseer

It is evident when we review the examples of true shepherds of God's people that they have a very focused heart. It is burdened for the welfare of His people. They are characterized by the attributes that an actual shepherd would have for his flocks. David fought bears and lions to protect the flocks of his father. Similarly, Paul poured his heart out for the congregations that he tended. He constantly bore the weight of the people and their needs. In 1 Peter 5, Peter lays out for us a picture of the heart of a true shepherd of the flock.

- NAB 1 Peter 5:1 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**,
 - The heart of the shepherd is to oversee the flock of God. He sees that he must pay attention to the flock. He can not ignore it. He knows his sheep, just like the shepherd in the fields.
 - He also understands that God allots the sheep to him. They are God's sheep, not his. He has no claim to them. God places them under his care for the proper time and then moves them on to other shepherds as He so desires. Just as Paul reminds the Ephesian Elders that "He purchased [the flock] with His own blood," the modern day shepherd must understand that it was not his blood that bought the sheep. He is not their owner; he is granted the privilege of being their caretaker.
 - **exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God;**

- No shepherd can be effective if he is not willing and eager to shepherd the flock. Those that serve under any other guise than for their true love of the flock will fail to do what they need to tend the sheep.
- The shepherd must serve gladly as God has so directed him. It is not the will of the man or his wife or friends that dictate the service of a shepherd, but the will of God.
- **and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;**
 - Peter reiterates the quality of an Elder that shows his service to be pure in nature. It is not for power, prestige, or money, but for love that he serves.
 - He is more than just a volunteer; he is eager to service. A shepherd does not need to be prodded to shepherd the flock. He has an eager, enthusiastic heart.
- **nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge,**
 - He is not an autocrat. He does not abuse the power that he has over the flock. His heart is not one that beats or drives the flock toward his goal, but one pictured in the shepherd that leads the flock and they follow after his voice.
 - The shepherd is not to “lord it over” (katakryieuo) the flock. The Scriptures warn us against such behavior within the church.
 - NAB Mark 10:42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the **Gentiles lord it over them;** and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 "**But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant;** 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.
 - NAB 3 John 1:9 I wrote something to the church; but **Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them,** does not accept what we say. 10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.
- **but proving to be examples to the flock.**
 - The shepherd must be an example. He must be a servant, just as each of us has been commanded to be by Christ. His heart is to have the flock follow his example, not to tell them to do and not do so himself.
 - NAB 1 Corinthians 4:15 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I exhort you, **be imitators of me.** 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

- NAB 1 Thessalonians 2:7 **But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.** 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. 9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; **11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,** 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.
- NAB 1 Corinthians 11:1 **Be imitators of me,** just as I also am of Christ.
- NAB Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in **following my example,** and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.
- NAB Acts 20:35 “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

The Goal of Oversight

The goal of oversight is to bring forth a mature believer. The process of continuing sanctification never ends while we remain on this earth. God wants us to grow up in all aspects concerning our lives in Christ. It is required that the Elders strive to attain this goal in each one under their care. It is clear from Scripture that the oversight is one of a spiritual nature, not one of a physical nature. It is also understood that the spiritual and physical are related, but this being said, the oversight that is unto the goal is maturity that is spiritual in nature. The outworking of this maturity will manifest itself in the physical realm. The Elders of this church are not orienting their ministry in this area toward invasion of personal matters. However, individual spiritual matters must be attended. When each of us stands before God we will stand on our own for what we have done. Going to a strong church does not abrogate our personal responsibilities to grow and live godly lives.

- NAB Colossians 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may **present every man complete in Christ.**
- NAB Ephesians 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, **to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.** 14 As a result,

we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

The Task of Oversight

Oversight within a congregation takes on two forms. There is the oversight over the entire congregation and oversight that is specific to each individual. As we have seen in the goal of oversight, the task of those that oversee is to present *each one* complete in Christ. It is clear that both forms of oversight are necessary. Though the Elders in the church will be greatly involved in general oversight, it is important to remember that each and every individual will need some unique oversight. We have seen that the oversight of the individual is spiritual in nature, not of a kind that is invasive in private matters.

Congregational Oversight

Oversight of the congregation at large has been outlined in our study on Church Leadership. The shepherds of the congregation are to teach, protect, and lead the members of the congregation. In this task, they are providing instruction that they believe is needed within this local church, protecting the members from heretical teaching, and giving overall guidance to the ministry and worship activities within the church. Each church will require different implementations of oversight in these areas. There are no two congregations that are the same. Each one is at a different place in its development. The Elders must be sensitive to the needs that must be met and challenges faced in this congregation in order to oversee the congregation effectively. As was described in our leadership lesson, the Elders must be involved with the lives of the people to see these needs and minister to them.

Individual Oversight

There are two forms of oversight associated with individuals. The first is initiated when either the individual requests specific oversight (generally in the form of counseling or discipling), or when an Elder becomes aware of a situation that needs attention. This first form is most often where individual oversight comes into play. The Elders may perform this oversight personally, or may choose to have those individuals in need guided by those most appropriate to the specific need. The Elders would still remain watchful over the activities and progress of the individual, but would not necessarily be directly involved.

There is a second form of individual oversight that is initiated by direct contact by an Elder or their designate with the expressed intent of doing a “spiritual checkup” on each one in the congregation. This second form is intended to probe more deeply than what

would otherwise be known from the normal intercourse within the congregation. Its focus will be on items such as prayer life, Bible study habits, daily relationship and communion with God, and other like spiritual matters. It is not intended to be a “show me your checkbook” type of contact. It is also not a time for an individual to “put on his or her church clothes.” This is the time to be honest with areas of weakness and share the encouragement found in God’s faithfulness in each life. It is not possible to state when or how often-such contacts will occur since the number of both Elders and congregation members will dictate what is feasible. We leave this matter to the Lord’s direction and guidance.

Summary

We have seen that oversight is a mandated function within a church; that the Elders of the church are responsible for ensuring that both the congregation at large and each individual is cared for. We see that the heart of the Elder is for the benefit of the congregation as he strives to make them complete in Christ. It is not an invasive ministry, but one of importance to the spiritual growth of each member of the body. Our practice is to prove “to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.”