

What I Expect from Elders/Shepherds

It is always easier to state what we don't want than what we do. However, there are some things that I expect from any leader, especially those who aspire to the role of Elder.

First, I expect transparency. There has been a lot of debate about the decision making in Acts 15—who made the decisions, what decisions they made. I think the important thing to get from this chapter is that the discussions and decisions were not made in isolation. The church heard what Paul and Barnabas had to say—which created dissension in the Pharisees (Vs. 5). In verse 6 it says the apostles and elders came together to discuss the matter. It does not say they went apart. They had to have been discussing the matter in front of the church, because Peter addressed them all (vs 7-11). Inverse 12 it says “all the assembly kept silence.” If they were not a part of the discussion then this verse would have no place.

Second, I expect them to be men of character. Not that mistakes might not be made, but when they are, that they own up to those mistakes, and ask forgiveness of those who may have been hurt. Tying into transparency, they should not mislead, or obfuscate, but to be open with what they say.

Third, I expect them to be men of experience. Paul was effective in his ministry because of what he had experienced before his conversion. He could therefore have compassion, and understand those who struggled with sin. Leaders who have struggled and overcome sin, are capable of a greater depth of understanding, and those influence is greater on those who are sinning. They can approach them with love and compassion knowing that we all struggle against sin. Just as Paul talks about his struggles to do what is right, and avoid that which is not right.

Fourth, I expect them to bring back those who stray from God's kingdom. I expect that when people fall away that they care enough for their souls to go in a godly, loving fashion and find out what they can do to help them back to the Lord.

Fifth, I expect them to be concerned with the lost. Those who have never known God should be sought out, taught, and brought to the Lord.

Sixth, I expect them to strengthen those who are weak. Many people are spiritually weak. They are more influenced by the world than by the church. They need to be brought to a point where they can “endure sound doctrine,” (II Tim. 4:3). They need to be nourished in faith and in the doctrine of Jesus Christ (I Tim. 4:6). These are spiritually sick and need healing just as much as those who are physically sick.

Seventh, I expect them to visit the sick, visit those who are in the hospital, those who may be housebound. They should care enough to lift the spirits of those who are sick. To make

themselves available to those who need them. When people are physically sick, they are vulnerable to the wiles of Satan just as much as those who are spiritually sick. Offering a prayer, giving an encouraging word means a lot to those are struggling with illness.

Eighth, I expect them to use the ability God has given for edification. (II Corinthians 10:8). The building up of the church is a major responsibility.

Ninth, I expect them to be shepherds, not managers. There are things that need to be taken care of in the church, however, the primary duty is to “shepherd” the flock. The idea of the shepherd as the leader in the church is used many more times than any other term. God expects them to make sure the “flock” is headed to good green pastures. That there is fresh clean water, that they are protected against “wolves.” The wolves can be from without, from within, or even among themselves. This is carried out by knowing the people they lead well enough to know when they need fed, when they need watered, and when they are in danger.

Tenth, I expect that they teach the Godly way of handling disputes and problems in the church. Matthew 18:15-17 Christ gives a formula for handling problems between brethren. If you are hurt (sinned against) by another, then it is your duty to go to that person (not an elder, not another member, but the person). If you are unable to settle the problem between the two of you, then you are to take 2 or 3 witnesses and go back to the person. If with the witnesses you can't settle the problem, then it goes to the church (again not another person or the elders—but the church). Christ continues to say if the person still refuses to listen, to make amends, then you are to view them as an infidel. This needs to be taught till people understand. If a person goes to an elder with a problem, then I would expect them to explain the process—not just say go talk to the person. If they refuse to go through the process—then they are at fault more than the person they feel has “sinned” against them.

In II Corinthians 10:8 it says if we know someone has something against you (yourself, not that you have something against another) that before you leave you gift at the altar, you need to go and be reconciled to the person.

I think we have many people who are sick because they would rather complain about another person, gossip about them, or ignore them, than to go and get the problem resolved as outlined in the scriptures.

May God's will be done in everything.

Diana M. Cochran