

# Leadership

Michael Hatcher, Editor

1997 Bellview Lectures

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*Michael Hatcher, Editor*

Twenty-Second Annual  
Bellview Lectures  
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# DEDICATION



(Left to right) Louis Herrington, Richard Parker, Harold Maxey, Jerry Caine, Bill Crowe, Henry Born, Jim Loy, and Elward Brantley.

## Deacons of the Bellview Church of Christ

We take great pleasure in dedicating this book of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Bellview Lectures, June 7-11, 1997, Pensacola, Florida to our faithful deacons: Henry Born, Elward Brantley, Gerald Caine, Bill Crowe, Louis Herrington, Jim Loy, Harold Maxey, and Richard Parker.

These men have proved themselves to be faithful to God's Word in both life and doctrine. Because of their love for God, the church, and this congregation, they have been diligent in the work assigned to them by the elders. They conscientiously take care of their work, but will also join in working with others in whatever way is needed. These men work taking care of the physical things dealing with the church, but also concerti themselves with spiritual matters. They are wonderful examples of men who are "labourers together with God" (I Cor. 3:9). The Bellview congregation has been greatly blessed by these men and their service.

For these men, their families, and their dedication to the truth of God's Word, we are extremely grateful. We are pleased we can give them this small recognition and pray that each one may be blessed by the Lord in a long and useful life in His service.

*Paul Brantley*

*Bill Gallaher*

*Fred Stancliff*

*Bellview Church Of Christ*

# PREFACE

Leadership is vital to any and every aspect of our lives. This principle is true relating to the Lord's church. Within the church, we have the greatest leader. Our leader is the Lord Jesus Christ. However, within each congregation of the church, there must also be good leaders for the success of the congregation. While our Commander-in-chief has established the orders of the church, there must be those who decide how to carry out the commands of our Lord. God set within the local congregation an eldership to lead the congregation, with deacons serving in the work which the elders appoint. We also recognize that there are others who lead within the congregation: preachers, Bible class teachers, etc. This book is designed to help leaders in becoming and remaining great leaders. We will be dealing with principles of leadership, the eldership and also deacons and their work, realizing the importance of this great and needed subject.

This book and lectureship would not be possible without the great leaders, elders, of the Bellview church of Christ: Paul Brantley, Bill Gallaher, and Fred Stancliff. Also appreciation is given to those who have been elders of this congregation in the past. It is only by their foresight and leadership that this lectureship continues. The Bellview congregation is also to be highly commended. They have followed the leadership of the elders as a good and faithful flock of God. Additionally, they love sound, healthy, faithful, gospel preaching and preachers. Many members work untiringly behind the scenes getting things ready, and making sure things run smoothly during the lectures.

The men speaking on the lectureship and writing for the book are men of undying loyalty to the truth of God's Word and the success of that great institution for which our Lord died. For years, they have studied and labored in the work of the church. They have studied God's Word, lived it, and preached it. They have spent hours, even years, in preparing the manuscripts for the book. We know their soundness and love for the Bible and the church, and appreciate their willingness to help in this great endeavor.

We pray that this book will help congregations and the leaders within those congregations in the great work they are endeavoring to perform. Lord willing this book will be a great addition to the other books dealing with the leadership in the church of Christ.

Michael Hatcher, Director  
March 4, 1997

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# THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE

*Joe E. Galloway*



Joe E. Galloway was born near Parkersburg, West Virginia. He is married to the former Barbara Anderson and they have four children and eleven grandchildren.

Joe graduated from Freed-Hardeman College in 1957. He preached his first sermon in Vienna, West Virginia in 1953. He has done local work with congregations in Tennessee, Ohio, West Virginia, and Virginia, and has worked in Tampere, Finland. He helped start a congregation in Greeneville, Tennessee, now known as the Asheville Highway Church of Christ, and is presently working with this congregation. This work is sponsored by the Cherokee Church of Christ, Johnson City, Tennessee. Since 1986, Joe has been a speaker on the half-hour weekly **TV Sunday School** class over WJHL, Johnson City, Tennessee. He maintains a large (1,860 lessons) Bible Correspondence Course program started in 1995. Joe conducts several gospel meetings each year, speaks on a number of lectureships, and writes for numerous brotherhood publications.

## INTRODUCTION

After the twelve spies returned from spying out the promised land, and ten of the spies had given the evil, discouraging report, Israel as a whole rebelled against God. They refused to obey God's will expressed by Caleb regarding the promised land: "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Num. 13:30). This resulted in God's pronouncement that none of those over twenty years old, except Joshua and Caleb, would be allowed to enter Canaan. God said, "But my servant Caleb, because he had **another spirit** with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (Num. 14:24). The attitude of Israel as a whole had been that of rebellious disobedience. The **other spirit**, spoken of in verse 24 and possessed and shown by Caleb and Joshua, was **the spirit of obedience!**

In discussing the attitude that had characterized the Christians at Ephesus while they were in the world before their obedience to the gospel, Paul told the Ephesians that theirs had been "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). This spirit is the exact opposite of **the spirit of obedience.**

The theme of this lectureship is **Leadership**. Leadership is effective only when there is good “followership,” and such must begin with our faithfully obeying and following God. Obeying God involves: (1) Doing what God said, “Do”; (2) Doing this the way He said to do it (when He specifies the way); and, (3) Doing it for the reason God said to do it. In this lesson we shall suggest some of the attitudes we must have in order to properly obey God—that which is involved in **the spirit of obedience**.

### **THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE DOES WHAT GOD REQUIRES WHETHER ANYONE ELSE DOES IT OR NOT**

Many are willing to obey God only if others do so. A wife may say she will obey the gospel **if** her husband obeys. Most of us could cite examples of members of the Lord’s church who excuse their unfaithfulness by what others are doing, or are not doing. One member agrees to teach a class **if** so-and-so will also teach a class. Others “excuse” their lack of Bible knowledge by saying, “I know as much of the Bible as \_\_\_\_\_ knows.” Or, it may be they excuse the little they give, or their failure to faithfully attend all services of the church, or they may wish to excuse the extremely few visits they make. They attempt to do so by pointing out that they do as much as others. Of course, the ones they compare themselves with are usually the least faithful in the congregation! Paul said that those “are not wise” who “[compare] themselves among themselves” (2 Cor. 10:12.) We need to remember that knowing to do good, and not doing it, is sin according to James 4:17! Also, it would be good to constantly keep in our minds the statement of Romans 14:12: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” Peter’s statement, even though he failed to live up to it, shows the attitude one should have toward Christ and toward His Word. He said, “Although all shall be offended, yet *will* not I” (Mark 14:29). Even if no one else in the world obeys God in some particular matter, I am still obligated to obey God!

As parents most of us at some time have been asked by our children why they couldn’t go to some questionable function, or do something we have forbidden. They then say, “Everyone else does it!” Of course **everyone** does **not** do such, but the important thing we point out to them is that we must do right regardless of what others do (or do not

do). Doing what the majority of people do has never been the gauge for determining right or wrong. God told Israel, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to *do* evil” (Exo. 23:2). It has often been pointed out that in the days of Noah the **majority** of the people perished! It was the **majority** that clamored for Christ’s crucifixion! Jesus pointed out in Matthew 7:13-14 that the **majority** will be lost! It is never safe to do something, or refuse to do something, just because it is the practice of the majority.

I am convinced that this is the reason some hesitate so long before taking a public stand against clear-cut error. **If** their friends and family would recognize and oppose this error, they would do so, but they do not want to lose their goodwill or evoke their condemnation; so they remain silent. When the **majority** see no cause for concern or alarm, it is difficult for other Christians (including many preachers and elders) to see any real need to speak up and resist these gradually growing changes in the congregation that are leading to full apostasy. In many congregations this attitude of going along with the thinking (or, lack of thinking!) of the majority has permitted false doctrine and practice to run rampant!

Currently there is a crying need for more Christians who have the spirit of Jeremiah towards speaking out even though others are unconcerned or aggressively opposed to answering error that is being taught and practiced. As the time of Judah’s captivity was rapidly approaching, Jeremiah unrelentingly proclaimed God’s impending judgment upon them and pleaded for them to amend their ways. He exhorted them to “ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein.... But they said, We will not walk *therein*” (Jer. 6:16). He warned them, “Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken” (Jer. 6:17). They “walked in the counsels *and* in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward” (Jer. 7:24). In refusing to listen to God’s message, “they did worse than their fathers” (Jer. 7:26). They wished Jeremiah to do as their fathers had earlier said to their prophets: “Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:10). They told Jeremiah, “Prophesy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand” (Jer. 11:21). Jeremiah warned them not to listen to their false prophets that were telling them, “Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon” (Jer. 27:14). Not willing to listen to Jere-

miah, they smote him and put him in the dungeon for many days (Jer. 37:15-16). Yet, when again asked, “Is there *any* word from the LORD?” (Jer. 37:17), Jeremiah did not hesitate at all to boldly give the negative response that was so unpopular with them. He replied, “There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon” (Jer. 37:17). His attitude remained the same as he had earlier expressed in Jeremiah 20:9: “But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not *stay*.”

### **THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE DOES WHAT GOD COMMANDS REGARDLESS OF OUR LIKES AND PREFERENCES**

Although few literally cut out and destroy portions of the Bible which they do not like, many follow only those things that they like. This is the reason for such a large number of variant denominational beliefs and practices. Yet, like disobedient Saul of the Old Testament, they will claim to have obeyed the commands of God (see 1 Sam. 15:13, 20). Saul evidently agreed with parts of God’s instructions; so he destroyed most of the Amalekites. However, he must have liked the idea of bringing king Agag back alive and preferred saving some of the sheep and oxen. What Saul called **obeying**, Samuel rightly called **rebellion, stubbornness, and rejecting the word of the Lord**: “For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being king*” (1 Sam. 15:23).

In Second Kings 5:10-12 we read of Naaman’s anger at the instructions from God, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.” His likes and preferences over what God said was shown by his anger and by his saying: “Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper” (2 Kin. 5:11). Also, his preferences were emphasized when he asked if the rivers of his home country would not be better than the specified **Jordan**. He asked, “May I not wash in them, and be clean?” (2 Kin. 5:12).

Doing what **we want to do** is not obedience at all. Suppose that we go to the doctor with a serious ailment. He properly makes a diagnosis and gives us three prescriptions. We fill the prescriptions at the local

pharmacy and begin taking the medications. One is a small tablet that we easily swallow; the second is a capsule that also goes down without difficulty; but, the third is a liquid with an extremely bitter taste. Subsequently, we continue taking the pill and the capsule, but we do not take the liquid medication. After several days with no evident improvement we return to the doctor and tell him the medication has not helped. What are we told if the doctor learns that of the three prescriptions we have taken only the medications we preferred? We are told that we have not followed his instructions at all! The only reason we even took two of the three prescriptions was that they met our approval. Likewise, doing what God requires, without regard to what we personally would rather do, is necessary if we are to really obey God.

God's ways and thoughts are as superior to ours as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isa. 55:8-9). Paul asks, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" (Rom. 11:34). We dare not presume to counsel Him! Having made us, and having provided for our salvation through the sacrifice of His own Son, God knows exactly what we need. He has the right to command and to expect our obedience. Surely we should be willing to obey His Word to the letter without regard for personal likes and preferences!

### **THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE DOES WHAT GOD SAYS EVEN IF IT DOESN'T SEEM REASONABLE**

Often man cannot see any connection between God's command and the desired results. Will washing in the Jordan River (2 Kin. 5:10) ordinarily cure leprosy? No modern-day medical doctor would prescribe such!

What military general would ever suppose that marching around a city daily for six days, seven times the seventh day, blowing a long blast on a ram's horn, and then giving a great shout (Jos. 6:3-5) would bring the walls down? Besides, some today would object to doing anything at all since God had already said, "I have given into thine hand Jericho" (Jos. 6:2). We are told today that, when God provides something as a gift of His grace, we can do nothing to receive it.

What is reasonable about anointing the eyes of a blind man with a clay made of a mixture of the earth and spittle? Can you imagine the lawsuits that would be filed if such was tried by a doctor today? Such an action today, at the least, would bring out a clamor of being crude

and unsanitary! And what is reasonable about telling him to go wash this off in the pool of Siloam in order to be cured (John 9:6-7)?

In each of these instances it could have been argued that God's instructions did not appear to be reasonable. Yet they were obeyed, and the promised results followed! Many today reject baptism for the remission of sins on this same basis. We are asked, "Do you think that the water actually washes away sins? If so, wouldn't sins be washed away every time you take a bath, or go swimming?" No, the sins are not physically removed by the water, but God removes them when we do exactly that which He requires for their removal—and God requires the penitent believer to be baptized to be forgiven (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

### THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE CAUSES ONE TO DO MORE THAN THE MINIMUM

Too many seem to be concerned with "How much do I **have** to do?" rather than "How much **can** I do?" We often hear some ask how much they **have** to give, how much they **have** to know of the Bible, how many services they **have** to attend, etc. It seems at times that the church is filled with many who serve God with heavy feet! They seem to think that God's requirements are too difficult and burdensome.

When we love someone, what we do for them is not burdensome! A mother will gladly get up many times during the night to feed or to check on her baby, because she loves it. Probably we all know of some who have cared for an invalid companion for many, many years without complaint. They did this, not because the tasks themselves were always pleasant, but because of their love for the companion. The apostle Paul spoke of the "labour of love" that explained the unceasing "work of faith" of the Thessalonians (1 The. 1:3). John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: **and his commandments are not grievous**" (1 John 5:3).

Jesus taught the principle of doing more than the law demanded—the idea of going the second mile (Mat. 5:41). He challenges us with the question, "What do ye more *than others*?" (Mat. 5:47). Brother Burton Coffman rightly observed:

Implicit in these words is the proclamation that Christians are different; they love more than others, will do more than others, and are in fact better in every way than others. Their righteousness is a matter of going beyond, giving the cloak also, going the second mile, turning the other cheek, loving

enemies, praying for those who persecute them, and, in short, being “sons of your Father who is in heaven” (Mat. 5: 45).<sup>1</sup>

### THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE WILL OBEY IN SPITE OF OBSTACLES

There are always difficulties to faithful obedience! It may be that we are so busy in all the things connected with everyday living that we think we don't have the time to serve God. Perhaps it is lack of finances. Everything involved in living and rearing a family in today's world costs money, and there are so many other things we need (or at least, want) that we cannot even afford. We feel that we simply cannot afford to give the amount needed for various works that need to be done in serving the Lord.

Candidly we must admit that we usually can find the finances for what we really want, or what we really think to be important. Many of us, in raising funds for various mission efforts, have often been told by congregations that their money is in very short supply—that they cannot help—even when we know that they are in the process of spending hundreds or thousands of dollars on things they really want for themselves such as new carpeting for the building, a new fellowship hall (or even a gymnasium!), etc. Brother V. P. Black has well written:

If all the members of the Church of Christ would plan and purpose to give as God has prospered them, we could evangelize the world in a short time.<sup>2</sup>

If members of the church had as much faith in the promises of God concerning giving as they do concerning the promises that Jehovah made about being baptized, we would have enough money in a short time to evangelize the world.<sup>3</sup>

He also pointed out that each year in America there is more spent for dog food than for evangelism in other countries.<sup>4</sup> Brother Ira Rice told of the Cleveland conference of the Adventists using a Brink's truck to transport the money they provided for mission work, and then added this note: “You could guard the money most of **us** contribute for missionary work with a B-B gun!”<sup>5</sup>

Again we repeat, we can find the money for what we **want**—for that which we consider important! What can be of more importance than preaching the gospel to the lost? To finance the preaching of the gospel we must be convinced that there is nothing more important than preaching the gospel to a lost world. When I was a student at

Freed-Hardeman College back in the mid-fifties, I remember brother H. A. Dixon getting up in Chapel following a presentation by a brother who had related his plans to preach the gospel in another nation and saying something like this:

I have long believed that the real reason we have not taken the gospel to every nation is that we do not firmly believe that the world is lost without the gospel. When we believe that the world is lost without the gospel, and that we are lost if we don't take it to them, we will get the job done.

Another obstacle to obeying God is timidity. We fear doing that which we have not done before. We may fear (and receive) opposition of family or friends, or even physical persecution. Paul wrote, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). We need to remember these encouraging words from our Lord: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6).

The examples of Hebrews 11 well illustrate the obstacles to doing God's will. What could be harder to do than to sacrifice one's own son, as Abraham was instructed to do (Heb. 11:17)? Think of the difficulty of leaving family, friends, and familiar country to go to permanently live in another land—and not even having any idea where this country was, nor what the living conditions there would be (Heb. 11:8). Imagine hearing the scoffing and experiencing the rejection that Noah had to endure in faithfully obeying God. He both preached to the ungodly people of his day (making no conversions) and built an ark when there was no visible evidence that there would be a flood. Or, consider how difficult it was for Moses to choose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. 11:24-27).

First John 5:4 says, "this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith." Hebrews 11 is known as "the faith chapter of the Bible" for this very reason. Each example of faith in that great chapter is an example of God's people overcoming enormous obstacles to obedience because of their deep trust in God! They had the attitude that David had when it appeared that his enemies would "swallow him up." He said:

Mine enemies would daily swallow *me* up: for *they be* many that fight against me, O thou most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In

God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me....In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me (Psa. 56:2-4,11).

One big obstacle to obeying when hardships are facing us is that of not actually being able to see what the outcome will be. Paul reminds us, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). To walk **by sight** is to obey only as long as we can see the earthly outcome of such. To walk **by faith** is to do what God’s Word says, regardless, trusting God for the outcome. Actually, we cannot know what is in store for us in this life. Yet, we **can know** that “if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). So, we know that if we faithfully do God’s will, He will make all things come out right for us in the end. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

Immediately before the statement we noticed a moment ago in Second Corinthians 5:1, the apostle said, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). **Seeing** the **unseen** sounds like a contradiction of terms. This takes us beyond the realm of physical sight to “the eye of faith.” This is the very reason Moses was able to forsake Egypt and take his stand with the people of God, faithfully obeying Him: “for he endured, as **seeing** him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). The first of this verse says he did this “by faith.”

### **THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE WILL NOT LOOK FOR A WAY AROUND DOING GOD’S WILL**

Often people try to find some Scripture that they can shape and twist to fit their way of thinking and living, instead of trying to carefully fit their lives to the Scriptures. Many times this comes out in conversation with someone in a statement such as this: “I know the Bible says that, but have you considered this?” The person will then present some erroneous idea in an effort to offset the effect of the clear Scripture just presented. Or he may try to set one Scripture against another, thinking to negate the plain statement of Scripture just presented.

Rather than looking for a way around doing God's will, we need the attitude of the Psalmist: "And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved" (Psa. 119:47). "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Psa. 119:59-60). "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psa. 119:89).

### CONCLUSION

The proper spirit of obedience will always lead us to seek to know God's Word as completely as possible, to believe all of it, and to carefully obey it to the very letter. Of Noah, we read: "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Gen. 7:22). May we so live that this can truthfully be said of each of us!

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1968), pp. 70-71.

<sup>2</sup>V. P. Black, *Rust As A Witness* (Plateau, AL: 1966), pp. 48-49.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>V. P. Black, *My God And My Money* (Dallas, TX: Christian Publishing Co., 1964), p. 57.

<sup>5</sup>Ira Y. Rice, Jr., *We CAN Evangelize the World* (Nashville, TN: Williams Printing Company, 1966), pp. 7-8.

# QUALITIES OF A LEADER

## *Harrell Davidson*



Harrell Davidson was born in Gibson County, Tennessee. He began leading singing for meetings at twelve years of age and was encouraged to preach the gospel. He attended Freed-Hardeman University, Harding University, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He preached his first sermon in 1955, and began preaching every Sunday in October 1958. Harrell preaches in several gospel meetings and lectureships each year. He has preached in most of the 50 states and in Europe, Asia, and Africa. He has written one study book on **Marriage and The Christian Home** (out of print). Harrell is the son of a former elder and preacher. He has worked with the church in

Obion, Tennessee for the past 16 years which is only 20 miles from where he was born and raised. He has worked with the church in Obion, Tennessee for the last 15 years.

Harrell is married to the former Carrielyn Spurlock and they have four children, three boys and one girl.

## QUALITY—THE WORD

It is very important that we understand the basic word that we are working with in this lesson. We mean by *quality* one who makes something what it is or should be, which has to do with one's basic nature or character. It is defined as the degree of excellence to which one subscribes. One may be known by being superior or inferior. Leaders in the Lord's church ought to maintain the highest standards possible.

This lectureship is mainly centered around the elders and deacons of the church. Certainly these discussions ought to pursue this train of thought. A fountain cannot rise higher than its head, and no congregation can rise above those who lead. Elders and deacons certainly fall into this category. However, there are others who lead the church from time to time under the oversight of the elders. We have Scripture readers, prayer leaders, men at the Lord's table, and song leaders. All these men are leading the church in some capacity. We say *men* because the Scriptures make quite clear that women cannot do the above mentioned things. "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim. 2:12). It is the case today that women have asserted themselves into some of these

roles in various congregations. Some women aspire to the role of leadership. Not one or two, but many congregations have leaders who are women, contrary to what God has commanded in His Word. The gravity of such a situation is tremendous. We are afraid that we have contributed to these unscriptural practices in order to elevate our ladies so that they may “feel” more welcome. So we let them have input where they should not be “put” at all. If they would turn from their input to their potential output for the Lord, the church would be better served in the community. Not one elder, preacher, or congregation has the authority to promote women to these levels of leadership. No one has the authority to break God’s will in order to do something. Women cannot lead the Lord’s church and be acceptable in the sight of God. We know that there are many things that the woman can do in and for the Lord’s church. She should function within these God-given responsibilities.

Some of the women have twisted the Scriptures to accommodate their leadership roles. One such woman quoted Paul, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (1 Cor. 14:34). She then said: “Well then, if we are to obey this injunction strictly, and to compel our women to keep silence in the churches, see what follows. We take all the women out of the choirs and singing groups, and oh! what music we would have with our male voices and our bass singers.” She goes on to argue that Paul would not include the women in various parts of worship “if he is to be taken literally.” If he is not to be taken literally, then what would the passage have to say to harmonize with other clear passages? This passage does not prohibit a woman from worshipping in song, prayer, the Lord’s Supper, or any other avenue of worship. The Scriptures indicate that she cannot be a “leader” in the areas of worship. This woman preacher told about “mounting the rostrum, and stood for forty minutes defending her cause.” One minute would have been too long in order to please the Lord. A woman is out of place in such situations. God’s blessed woman will not want to violate His will in anything, much less be in a leadership role in the church. She may have certain qualities, but these characteristics should be foreign to the one trying to please God. We are addressing leaders and not

“leaderettes.” There are many works that God’s approved woman can do, and in doing so she is well pleasing in the sight of God

### LEADERS MUST ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

One may be appointed to serve as a leader. Appointing is not enough! One must accept such appointment and in doing so must exercise—put into practice—the leading. A song leader cannot be depended upon if he refuses week in and week out to lead the singing. The same is true of any other person appointed to lead the congregation as we attempt to worship and serve the Lord. People in our society today have the idea “let George do it.” Men are not wanting to accept responsibility. It has been that way from the Garden of Eden until the present day. Let us notice a few situations that indicate a lack of accepting responsibility.

When Eve and then Adam had partaken of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil look what happened. “[T]hey heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden” (Gen. 3:8), and He wanted to know what they had done. Adam’s reply to God is so typical of today. “And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:12). From that time until present day we have not wanted to assume personal responsibility for our own actions. We have all too quickly ascribed responsibility to someone else. Adam said that Eve gave him the fruit. He is saying, in effect, it was not my fault at all. I had nothing to do with it. It was the woman that THOU gave me. He thus lays the responsibility on Eve and God. You should not have given me this woman. She is the cause of it all. It is all your fault. Sounds like brethren in 1997.

God turns to Eve for an answer; “And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this *that* thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:13). Eve refuses to accept the responsibility for her sins as did Adam. The only difference is that she put the blame off on the devil.

When Moses had received the tables of stone that contained the ten commandment law, he and Joshua came down from the mountain. They hear noises. First it was thought to be noise of war (cf., Exo. 32:17). Moses listening so intently heard a distinction between war noise and merrymaking for he replied that what he heard was the “the noise of *them that sing*” (Exo. 32:18). What unfolded was an excuse of one who would not accept personal responsibility. Aaron bent to

the concerns of the people. They wanted a god of some kind; for Moses that brought them out of bondage across the Red Sea was gone up into the mountain, and they knew not when he would return. Laboring with the idea that Moses must have been their god, in his absence they requested a replacement for him. Aaron, the brother of Moses, commanded them that had gold to break the gold off of their earrings and give it to him, and he would take care of the matter. He accepted the kind of responsibility that the people wanted him to assume. There is a later lesson that we will get from this, but here let us focus our attention on accepting personal responsibility. Hear it now, “And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break *it* off. So they gave *it* me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf” (Exo. 32:24). How innocent can one be? I just threw in that gold and out walked this calf. This is the way that Aaron would like it to appear. Let’s go back a little and see what really happened. “And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (Exo. 32:4). What did Aaron do? He took a graving tool and very meticulously worked over the art work of the golden calf. Surely there must have been much involvement, perhaps running into several hours of hard work. Regardless of the time element, the end result was still the same. He made that golden calf and later said “the people” and “there came out this calf.” What was the problem? He could not accept the personal responsibility for his actions. He had to lay the blame somewhere else.

Saul, the first king over Israel, was sent to utterly destroy the Amalekites (cf., 1 Sam. 15:3). Nothing was to be spared. When Samuel met Saul and his army returning, he heard sheep bleating and oxen mooing (lowing). He asked Saul if he had kept the commandment of God? Saul assured him that he indeed had kept it. Samuel wondered then about what he was hearing with his own ears. This was not hearsay! He heard the sheep and the oxen with his own ears. Now look at the whole story. “And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest *we* have utterly destroyed.” (1 Sam. 15:15). Look at the pronoun *them*. Not Saul, mind you, but “they” the people did this. Saul put the charge at the

feet of the people lest there be any misunderstanding. “For the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen.” Saul just didn’t have anything to do with this breaking of God’s command whatsoever, at least to hear him tell it. He still argues that he has kept the commandment of God (cf., 1 Sam. 15:20). Then Samuel replies with that precious verse that so many great sermons have been preached from, and rightly so, “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). God’s great blessings are stored back for those that keep His commandments.

The New Testament has excuse makers in it also, as is the case in Luke 14, beginning with verse 16. One had bought land while another had bought oxen. The first had to go see the land to make sure that he was getting what he paid for. The second had to go and make sure that the oxen could pull the plow. The third fellow didn’t give much of an excuse. This reminds me more of my brethren today. He said, “And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come” (Luke 14:20). What was the problem in all these situations? People failed to accept their personal responsibility. All of us need to learn this lesson. Especially is this so with regards to elders and preachers.

It is one thing to appoint an elder. To get him as an individual, and the eldership collectively, to accept responsibility is quite a different matter. Too many men are in the eldership who are materialists. The main thing they look at is the attendance board down front. As long as the attendance is climbing and the contribution equals or goes over the budget, then all is well. Let the reverse take place and all bedlam breaks. Brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr., stated the facts well in an article in his weekly bulletin. He referred to such as “Noise, Nickels, and Numbers.” That hits the nail on the head! We are so number conscious today that we get the idea that the church is going into oblivion if the numbers don’t reach our expectations.

This same philosophy is recorded in the number of programs the local congregation has. We have a program for the widows and widowers. There is another one for the middle age group. There are numerous youth activities. Many congregations have basketball programs or aerobics. We have visitation programs, and on and on the list could go. Excuse me; may I ask one question? Where do you find one

program in the New Testament church? There is not one described as such on the pages of Holy Writ. We have so many programs that the church is programmed to death. Do the elders receive the blame if all these programs do not work? Not in the least. It is almost always the preacher's fault. It is time for the moving van to pull up and move this lazy fellow out of the country; then let's hire a human resource director (public relations person) to direct the affairs of the church. Then maybe we can get back on track. Everything is wrong with this scenario. The elders must accept the responsibility of the church meeting or not meeting its desired goals. The elders need to be over all those programs (if they must have them); then, if they don't work, the elders will know where to lay the blame. Therefore, elders need to make up their minds once and for all what kind of person they want to work with them. If they want a preacher, then turn him loose and let him study to preach. Send him on his way if he will not declare the whole counsel of God. If you want a person to keep the congregation all hyped up and have growth at any cost, then hire an after dinner speaker that can entertain the congregation. One such person said that he had found out how to cut his lesson to 18 minutes. He opined how that he would cut all the Scriptures out except one. He would tell some funny stories to keep the audience in the palm of his hand. He thought to close with an impassioned plea and this way he could have his talks (not sermons by any stretch of the imagination) finished in 18 minutes. Look at what he had to do. He left the Scriptures out of his little talk! That is precisely what some elders are wanting today. Deacons are not immune to this church disease. Legions of preachers have been put on the road looking for a new place to go preach because the deacons fired them. This is not the duty of the deacons in the Lord's church. In such cases the deacons are holding the church hostage. They make demands of the elders and if those demands are not met, they will take their group and go somewhere else. Elders buckle under the pressure and let them have their way. That local congregation has fallen due to two things. The elders did not accept the responsibility, and the deacons took over for them. Sometimes it is best to let these folk go on somewhere else if they will not repent.

Preachers are not immune to this church disease either. One congregation (this is happening all over the country) has four or five different preachers. We have senior preachers, youth ministers, activity

ministers, counseling ministers, and tape ministers *ad infinitum*. Look now at what happens! The senior preacher (usually the one who does the bulk of the preaching) makes the public claim that he meets with the elders and then with the rest of the staff. "I answer to the elders while the staff answers to me," he said. Who ever put one preacher in charge of the church, much less the "staff"? God-fearing elders did not make this arrangement. Some preachers have attempted to "run" the church themselves. All they wind up doing is making a complete and total failure of that particular congregation. Elders in this case have closed their eyes to their God-given responsibilities, and delegated that responsibility to one whom God has never authorized to rule anything. Sometimes the preacher has already got such a following behind him that he overrules the elders and takes over on his own. He might appoint himself an "apostle" over the elders. It is strange how that a preacher in trouble with his elders, who is told that he ought to be looking for a place to go, will take a sabbatical and go out into Arizona somewhere. During a two or three week period, the Lord appears to him and appoints him an apostle. He goes back home and announces to the elders that he has a higher calling and he will just stay. One such preacher opined as to how he was riding along in the car out in a western state when the Holy Spirit came and sat with him in the car and made the appointment. He said that he was at first scared to death, but the Spirit reassured him. He was pulled over by a policeman who asked, "Where is that fellow that was sitting with you a moment ago?" The preacher said, "Why, that was the Holy Spirit and He is gone." Laughable, you say, but it is a true story. We suspect that for every unqualified elder there are twice as many crooked preachers.

### **THE DESIRE MUST BE RIGHT**

Though desire is the first qualification for an elder, we are discussing qualities and have something else in mind. Paul said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1). Men must be able to control their desires and want proper things. Paul illustrates this in no uncertain terms. While the Jews did not trust Paul (and they did many things to him to get his mouth stopped), he had the proper desire for these people. Above all, he wanted them saved. It is very possible that we have the wrong kind of desire. Solomon said, "The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his

neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes” (Pro. 21:10). We heard brother Nichols tell of a child that wanted a yellow-jacket. The mother of the child told the nurse, “Give him what he wants.” He picked up the yellow-jacket and got stung. He found out that he really did not want that wasp. “The desire of the righteous *is* only good; *but* the expectation of the wicked *is* wrath” (Pro. 11:23). We must be very careful and desire the proper things.

Wealth is not what makes one great. It is rather the proper use of wealth that separates us from others. In America we are all wealthy. The third world nations average about six hundred dollars per year in salary. Many preachers are paid more than this for one week. When we speak of the wealthy, we ought to refer to ourselves. Perhaps no other country in the world has the array of fine things as we do. We are greatly blessed, but to desire wealth and put it above everything else is sinful. We sometimes tell young people be careful what you want with all your heart for you will surely get it. We need the right kind of heart and by the heart cultivate the proper desire. Peter said, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). Perhaps as never before we need to develop a desire for the “old Jerusalem” gospel. It is not going to come over night. It is something that is cultivated in the hearts of good and honest men who want to propel the church forward in the right direction. Our leaders in the church need good hearts: hearts that are tender and kind; hearts that are melted by the obedience of others; hearts that have developed a taste for the Word of God. In some ways the leaders need to be like great coaches. When the team loses, the coach says it is his fault. When they win, he says the team did it. He just put the pieces together, but it was the team effort that got the job done. Let us be quick to give credit where credit is due. We all like to hear someone say, “That is a good job,” or “You are really doing well.” A little encouragement from time to time will accomplish so much for the kingdom.

“A *good* name is rather to be chosen than great riches, *and* loving favour rather than silver and gold” (Pro. 22:1). We are thankful to God for the rich heritage that we personally have enjoyed, such as being raised in a Christian home. Every preacher stayed at our house. We had the privilege of being reared at the feet of a wonderful father who was an elder in the Lord’s church for twenty-five years before he

resigned to preach. In his wisdom he said to me, “Son, every preacher ought to be an elder once and every elder ought to be a preacher once; then, they would both have a better understanding.” Who could have a greater heritage? Dad and Mom were possessed with the proper thoughts, and a vision of what they wanted their children to become. They gave us music lessons when such lessons cost five dollars each week. A meal ticket was five dollars per month. After music lessons they gave us professional voice lessons. Where were they leading us? What was in their mind? They wanted their three sons to be gospel preachers. Though our dad rests in the heart of the earth, he saw all three sons become gospel preachers. He saw them faithful and grieved with us when we were told to move due to unruly people. He had prepared us for those occasions. Dad and Mom taught us the beauty of the church. They insisted that the church was more important than anything else. We just didn’t know any different! My mother lives close to me, and we rejoice that she has been able to live this long and see some of the fruit of her labors in her children. This is the picture of God’s blessed man and woman.

The late brother Franklin Camp asked me if I would write a book on “God’s Blessed Man”? I told him that I might. He gave me stacks of material for such an effort. Although the book has not materialized as yet, we have preached that material from front to back. Brother Camp had a part in our dad’s funeral service.

Brother Guy N. Woods was a personal friend and adviser, a wonderful man of God. What a heritage and legacy has been handed down to us. It would literally break my heart to let the good name that has been handed to us drop by the wayside. Many people have greater wealth, but none have a greater name.

We were taught by an elder and his wife. When people criticized the elders or the church, dad would go to the garden, gather a bucket full of vegetables and take it to them. He returned kindness when others were not so kind. He shed oceans of tears over the church. He walked among the elite and withdrew his support when a Christian college would not hew the line. He followed a false teacher all the way to the train depot to rebuke him for preaching error. He took an active part in children’s homes. He was ready to every good work. These are qualities of leadership—qualities that we hold high and from which we drink deeply of the fount of wisdom that was

displayed before us day by day. In the sight of the world he never knew what greatness was about. The way that the world measures things was not in his heart. God's "yardstick" was the only measurement by which he measured and desired to be measured. True greatness is not found in things. They are found in meekness, kindness, honesty, integrity, loving kindness, and mercy. Thank thee, O God, for such a name to wear and the "cause" to live and die for.

# AUTHORITY OF ELDERS

*Bobby Duncan*



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He has done local evangelistic work on a full time basis with only three churches: Munford, Alabama (1956-1958); Sixth Avenue in Jasper, Alabama (1976-1983); and, Adamsville, Alabama (1958-1976 and 1983-Present).

Bobby has conducted daily radio programs in Talledega, Birmingham, and Jasper, Alabama, and daily television programs in Jasper and Birmingham. He edited **Words of Truth** for over seven years and now edits **Vigil**, a monthly publication begun by himself and the Adamsville church in 1973. He is a frequent speaker in meetings and lectureships and is the author of **The Elders Which Are Among You**, several booklets, and hundreds of published articles.

He is married to the former Lois Ann Elliott of Carbon Hill, Alabama, and they have two children: Jill and Tim, and two grandchildren.

## INTRODUCTION

While this lesson has to do with “The Authority of Elders,” We will begin by talking about some things that are foundational to this study. We will observe that it is absolutely essential that authority in a local congregation be vested in some person or some body of people. We will then show from the Scriptures that the eldership is the body of people who have been designated by God as the ones in whom authority is vested.

A great dictum of the Restoration Movement is stated in the following words: “In matters of faith, unity; in opinion, liberty; and in all things, charity.” We would do well to repeat this from time to time, and to be reminded of its implications. Perhaps it is superfluous to point out that matters of faith are those things believed because they are clearly revealed in the Bible, for “faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Matters of opinion are those things concerning which the Bible is silent. In such cases, of course, each one is free to have his own opinion. It is a tragic mistake to treat matters of faith as if they were nothing more than opinion; it is

also a tragic mistake to treat matters of opinion as if they were matters of faith. We call those people liberal who treat matters of faith as if they were opinion. We usually refer to those as being anti- who treat matters of opinion as if they were matters of faith. We must not deny people liberty in areas of judgment or opinion.

In matters of faith, unity can be obtained by all who follow the teaching of the Word of God. In First John 1:7 the inspired writer declares, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Notice, please, that walking in the light causes us to have fellowship with all others who are walking in the light. If two parties are not in fellowship with each other, then at least one of those parties is not walking in the light, and perhaps both of them are not. If both are walking in the light, then they will be in fellowship with each other. To walk in the light means, of course, to follow the teaching of the Word of God. God's plan for unity in matters of faith is for all to follow the teaching of the Word of God.

But there is a sense in which all the members of a local congregation also must be united in matters of judgment or opinion. Notice the words of Paul from First Corinthians 1:10: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that* ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

The church built by Jesus has only one organization, and that organization is the local congregation. No congregation is a member of any larger organization of congregations. The passage we just read, while showing that denominational division is wrong, was actually written to enjoin unity in the local church at Corinth. To the Philippians Paul wrote, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phi. 1:27). The psalmist said, "Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1). In John 17:20-21, our Lord prayed,

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

The words of Paul recorded in Ephesians 4:1-3 should be read often by us all:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This verse does not mean we will all think alike in matters of judgment; it rather shows that there must be unity and harmony of action in a local congregation, even in the realm of judgment or opinion. It should be easy for us to see why such is the case. If it were not so, it would be impossible to have an orderly period of worship or an effective program of work. The hour at which the church begins its worship on the Lord's day is a matter of judgment or personal preference. For example, some might prefer to meet at nine o'clock, some at nine-thirty, and others at ten o'clock. Each believes his preferred time would be best. But each one is not at liberty to begin the service at whatever hour his own personal preference or his own judgment dictates. That would create mass confusion. The number of songs to be sung and the number of verses of each song are both in the realm of opinion. In every congregation there would probably be differences of opinion with reference to these things. But look at the confusion it would cause if each one acted on his own personal preference with reference to this matter. There must be unity and harmony with reference to such matters. Who a congregation selects to preach in a gospel meeting is a matter of judgment, so long as the one selected is sound in doctrine and in life. Yet there would be different opinions with reference to the best one to invite. In such cases the entire congregation must act harmoniously and not according to the wishes or personal preference of all the individuals that make up the congregation.

There are hundreds of decisions in the realm of judgment which must be made, and which affect the entire congregation. If a church is to have unity and harmony, there must be unity and harmony even in matters of judgment. Since human judgment and personal preferences do often differ, then it becomes essential that all the members of a local congregation yield to the judgment of certain ones in order to have unity in matters of judgment.

We raise this question then: To whose judgment are the members of a local congregation to yield that unity and harmony might prevail?

Does the Bible answer that question? Has God ordained that certain ones oversee the congregation, and that all the members submit to those overseers? He has, and that right clearly and emphatically. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you." "Obey" and "submit" are quite significant. If I, a member of a local church, do not obey the elders of that local church, then I am not obeying God, because God said to obey the elders. If I do not submit to the elders, then I am not submitting to God, because God said for me to submit to the elders. Notice also: "that have the rule over." This entire clause translates one Greek word. The same word is translated "governor" in Matthew 2:6 in speaking of Christ and in Acts 7:10 when it is speaking of Joseph.

Another significant thing about this verse is that it says the elders "must give account" of those for whose souls they watch. How could justice demand they give account of that over which they exercise no control and over which they have no authority?

Back in verse 7 of this same chapter the writer says, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation." It is interesting to note that the same Greek word is translated "have the rule over," as is so translated in verse 17.

First Thessalonians 5:12 says, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." This verse does not name the elders as being the ones who are over us, but we know from Hebrews 13 and other passages they are the ones under consideration in this verse. This verse says they "are over you in the Lord." Some have the mistaken idea that elders can make a given decision respecting the congregation only if that decision coincides with the wishes of the members of the congregation as a whole. If that were the case, then the elders would not be over the congregation; instead, they would be under the congregation. Paul should have said, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are under you in the Lord, and admonish you." But that is not what he said; he said, "and are over you in the Lord."

In First Timothy 5:17 this same Greek word is used by Paul when he writes, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” Notice that “rule” is used. This is the same word, both in English and Greek, which is found three times in First Timothy 3. In listing the qualifications of elders, the apostle says, “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity” (1 Tim 3:4). Question: Does a man have authority over his children? Look also at verse 5: “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” Look also at verse 12, where the qualifications of deacons are being discussed: “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.” Would one take the position that God never intended for a man to exercise any authority in rearing his children? Fathers are to rule their children, and elders are to rule the church.

Several years ago a brother wrote an article in which he said that the Greek word which means “authority” is never used with reference to the relationship obtaining between elders and the congregation. Does that prove an eldership has no authority over a congregation entrusted into its care? If so, that same argument would prove that fathers have no authority over their children, for that word is never used in connection with the relationship of fathers and children. This does not negate the fact that fathers are to rule their children in harmony with the will of God, and that elders are to rule the church in harmony with the will of God.

In Acts 20 there is an account of Paul’s sending from Miletus to call for the elders of the church at Ephesus. When they came, Paul said to them, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). *Overseers* is in other passages translated “bishop.” Thayer defines the word as meaning, “**an overseer**, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, **any curator, guardian, or superintendent.**”<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that some elders have done a poor job, just as some preachers have done a poor job. There is no doubt some men have been appointed to the eldership without being scripturally qualified. There is also no doubt that some elders have sadly misunder-

stood their work and have abused the authority God has given them. These facts, however, do not justify our over-reacting by repudiating God's plan for the government of His church, or by insisting that elders have no authority.

Some have argued that the only authority an eldership has is the authority of setting a good example. First Peter 5:1-3 is used:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

"Neither as being Lords over God's heritage," is taken to mean that an eldership has no authority to make decisions with respect to a congregation, and that expect the members of a congregation need not abide by those decisions. Some believe the elders are to carry into their meetings the wishes of the congregation and make decisions accordingly. They think elders are like those elected to the legislature; that is, they think it is the job of the elders to represent the wishes of the people in meetings of the elders. But the government of the Lord's church is not a government "of the people, by the people, for the people." It is rather a government of God's people by those appointed of God to govern His people. If an eldership's decisions must be representative of the wishes of the members of the church, then there would be no need of elders. A simple vote of the entire membership would more nearly guarantee that all decisions properly represent the wishes of the majority.

Elders are not acting as "lords over *God's* heritage" when they make decisions which might not be in harmony with the wishes of the majority of the members. They are acting as "lords over *God's* heritage" when their decisions reflect their own personal interests instead of the best interests of the church. A statement in Mark 10:42-45 illustrates this point:

But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Jesus here declares that the apostles would not exercise lordship. Does that mean the apostles had no authority to give commands and expect those commands to be obeyed? Certainly not! The apostles were told, “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mat. 18:18). Paul told the Corinthians, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). To say the apostles were not to exercise lordship was not to say they had no authority to command and expect their commands to be obeyed.

A parallel passage in Luke 22:25 says, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.” The idea is that the relationship between an apostle and those to whom he gave commands is not the relationship of a king to his subjects. The subjects serve the king, and the king is the source of benefits to his subjects. But those who obey the commands of the apostles are not serving the apostles; they are serving the Lord, and the Lord, not the apostles, is the source of all benefits to those who serve him.

Even so is it with an eldership. Elders do not rule so the congregation might serve them, but so it might serve the Lord effectively. Furthermore, the Lord, not the elders, is the source of the benefits and blessings which come to those who serve Him by faithful submission to a devoted eldership. To refuse submission to an eldership simply because its decisions do not coincide with my personal preferences would be equal to refusing obedience to an apostolic injunction simply because it does not suit me to obey it.

When an eldership acts in what it considers the best interests of the church, even though the members of the church do not like the action, the elders are not “being lords over *God’s* heritage.” If an eldership used its authority merely for the personal welfare or satisfaction of those who make up the eldership instead of for the general well-being of the church, then it would be abusing its authority. The elders would be acting as “lords over *God’s* heritage,” and this would be a clear violation of First Peter 5:3. There can be little doubt that some elderships have abused their authority in this manner. An over-reaction to this abuse has led some to affirm that the Scriptures actually give

elders no right to make decisions with reference to the congregation. But the fact some may have abused their authority is no justification for taking the position that an eldership has no authority.

The elders of the Ephesian church were warned by the apostle Paul in the following words:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

Now why does Paul warn the elders and tell them to watch, if the elders have no authority to make any decisions respecting the congregation they oversee? And how could they even be called overseers if such were the case?

God's plan for unity in the church with reference to matters of faith is that all follow the written revelation of God's will. God's plan for unity in the local church with reference to matters of judgment is that all submit to the judgment of the elders of the church. I have no more right to refuse to submit to the eldership of the local congregation in matters of judgment than I have to refuse to submit to the Word of God in matters of faith. The former is just as much a violation of the will of God as is the latter.

Before I bring this discussion to a close, it needs to be mentioned that we are discussing the authority of an eldership, and not the authority of **an** elder. Sometimes an elder will have the mistaken idea that he, as an individual elder, has some authority to make decisions with reference to the congregation. But the authority we have talked about does not reside in an elder, but in an eldership. (I know there are some who have objected to the use of *eldership*, saying that word is not in the Bible. That is true, but *presbytery* in First Timothy 4:14 is defined by Thayer as meaning a "body of elders."<sup>2</sup> That is all in the world we mean when we talk about the eldership.) We must recognize that there is a great deal of difference between the authority of an eldership and the authority of an individual elder. How much authority does one elder have to make decisions affecting the congregation? The same amount of authority any other one member of the church has. If God had intended that the congregation be overseen by one elder, He would not have required a plurality of elders over each church.

This is not to say that the body of elders cannot delegate certain authority to one elder to handle some particular job in the way he thinks best without consulting the other elders. But when he so acts, he is acting, not as an elder, but as one authorized by the elders to do a certain thing. The eldership might also delegate authority in the very same way to any other member of the church, even those who are not elders.

There is a difference also between superintending the activities of a congregation with proper authority and in being dictatorial or dogmatic in so doing. The eldership that is dictatorial and dogmatic is one which imposes its own personal will on others in an arbitrary way without consideration of what might be best for those under its supervision. Such an eldership considers its decisions above review and never gives consideration to the fact it may make a mistake. The wise eldership will always acknowledge its own humanity and ask for input on the part of every member of the congregation. And since the decisions of an eldership are within the realm of judgment, it can be expected to make some mistakes. After all, none of us can claim never to err in judgment.

Should the members of the congregation submit to the elders, even when the elders have made a mistake in judgment? The answer is yes. Why? There are two reasons. First, if it is in the realm of judgment, how can members be certain they have made a mistake? All they know is that the judgment of the elders differs with their judgment in this particular matter. To say they made a mistake is to exalt one's own judgment above the judgment of the entire eldership. Unless enough time has elapsed that a certain decision has proven to be a mistake, we need to be careful about declaring a decision of the eldership to be the wrong decision. It has always been a source of amusement to me that a certain matter could arise, and the elders discuss that matter, pray over the matter, perhaps study it for several weeks, and then make a decision based on the very best information they have, but the very minute their decision is announced some good brother who was not in on the discussion and who has not given one minute's thought to the matter can immediately proclaim the elders have made a mistake. Do you know why that man is not an elder? An elder cannot be self-willed (Tit. 1:7), and that man is self-willed. He is determined that his way is best, even though he does not have ac-

cess to all the facts, not to mention the fact that his way flies in the face of the entire eldership.

A second reason why we must submit to the eldership, even if the elders make mistakes, is that the Bible teaches that we are to submit to the elders. God knew that elders would not be perfect. He knew they would be human beings and, as such, would make mistakes. Still he said, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

Preachers can do a great deal to help members of the church love and appreciate their elders, or they can do a great deal to keep members from submitting to the elders. If a church has a sound eldership, the preacher should remind the members of that fairly regularly. He should let the members know he respects the elders, and encourage them to do the same. If he privately grumbles and complains to the members about the mistakes made by the elders, he is conditioning the members to be unhappy with the leadership of the church. This is not to say there should be any hypocrisy on the part of anyone, but sincere appreciation should be shown those who make the sacrifices necessary to be elders in the Lord’s church.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers And Authors, Inc., n.d.), p. 243.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 535.

# EXPOSITION OF 1 PETER 5:1-4

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## INTRODUCTION

There is a great need today for emphasis on qualified leadership, just as there was in the first century. There is also a need to instruct the church in its duties and responsibilities to develop and maintain scriptural organization. The church has a responsibility to respect and follow qualified men who lead in righteousness even though their decisions may not be popular with the carnal-minded. The church, including the elders have a responsibility to demand a pulpit that is doctrinally sound. There is a great need today for faithful gospel preachers to “preach the word,” not as the enemy of the eldership nor of the brethren, but simply as a proclaimer of truth. Weaknesses within the church can be discussed and needed exhortations can be given that will produce spiritual growth.

## THE ELDERS WHICH ARE AMONG YOU

Several words describe the work of oversight, leadership, rule and authority within the local church. “Elder” (from the Greek *presbuteros*) is the most commonly used term; it appears sixteen times with reference to the office or work within the church (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim. 5:1, 17, 19; Tit. 1:5; Jam. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1). The Greek word translated bishop or overseer is used five times (Phi. 1:1; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1-2; Tit. 1:7). The word transliterated “presbytery” is used in one passage (1 Tim.

4:14), and “pastor” is found in one passage (Eph. 4:11). These terms refer to the same office or work and are used interchangeably within two texts. In Acts 20 the same group of men are called “elders” (verse 17) and “overseers” (verse 28). In Titus 1 the same group of men are called “elders” (verse 5) or (in the singular) “bishop” (verse 7).

In the denominational world a distinction is made between elders, bishops, and pastors. These distinctions arose during the apostasy and is an identifying mark of the corruption of New Testament organization. These Bible terms never refer to one who is a preacher or evangelist (2 Tim. 4:1-5) as the denominations often affirm, unless he has been appointed as such. Why do most denominations call their preacher “pastor”? Many who preach never meet the qualifications to be ordained as pastors, elders, or bishops. Denominational preachers are often falsely called “pastor.” This is an unscriptural use of “pastor.” Sometimes one serving as a local evangelist will also be qualified and selected to serve in the eldership. Thus, a dual role is possible, just as Peter served in a dual role as an apostle and as an elder (1 Pet. 5:1). In either case, the reason must be that one has met the qualification of the Scriptures.

### WHICH ARE AMONG YOU

The letter is addressed to “the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet. 1:1-2). These were Christians scattered in the geographical area of “Asia Minor,” in the country now known as Turkey. They were passing through fiery trials of persecution (1 Pet. 1:7) and needed exhortations to patiently endure and to hold on to the blessed hope of eternal life. Every member needed to be strengthened, comforted, and encouraged to be faithful (1 Pet. 1:9). Elders have a special responsibility locally to shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28-32). At times like these, elders must arise to the occasion and go the second mile. It is not a time for indifference, lukewarmness, or procrastination. Peter saw the need for leadership to be “exhorted” to lead. It must also be realized that the congregations would be expected to follow, submit, obey, cooperate, and serve harmoniously with God-ordained and qualified elders.

We need leadership in every congregation to diligently feed the flock and take their oversight seriously. We need godly examples and role models (ensamples or examples) to show us the way. We need

elders to convict the gainsayers (Tit. 1:9). We need elders who will care for the flock and expose the wolves (Acts 20:28-31; Mat. 7:15). We need elders who care more about pleasing God than what is politically correct (Acts 5:19-20). We need elders who care about restoring one erring soul (Luke 15; Gal. 6:1; Jam. 5:19-20) more than smiling over the ninety-nine who are safe. Elders need to be exhorted today to “take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock” (Acts 20:28) to shepherd the flock, which would stop the liberals from bringing in their damnable heresy (2 Pet. 2:1). Elders should promote evangelism, benevolence, and edification, which are the works of the church. We must develop local men to accept the responsibility and to faithfully do their work that the church might do its work. Brethren who have spiritual needs should call the elders of the church (Jam. 5:14).

Through the years I have greatly appreciated brother Roy J. Hearn and the instruction and materials he presented on “The Eldership” while I was a student at the Memphis School of Preaching. One area that I found particularly thought provoking dealt with “Duties Of The Church To The Elders” (class notes). The major points are briefly listed:

1. Members are to know the elders (1 The. 5:12).
2. Members are to esteem them highly in love (1 The. 5:13).
3. Members are to be submissive, yield, to the elders (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17).
4. Members are to obey the elders (Heb. 13:17).
5. Rebuke not an elder (any older man), but entreat him as a father (1 Tim. 5:1).
6. Receive not an accusation against an elder except in the mouth of two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19-20).
7. Elders that sin rebuke before all (1 Tim. 5:20).
8. Imitate them in faith and service (Heb. 13:7).
9. When in need, call the elders (Jam. 5:14).

A thorough discussion of each point is needed to properly inform each member of the church of his duty toward the elders. This instruction would greatly encourage a better understanding of New Testament organization.

## I EXHORT

Peter is an apostle of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:1); yet he addresses his exhortation as a fellow-elder (*ho sumprebuteros*) (1 Pet. 5:1). There is no hint to a claim of supremacy over them, but of mutual responsibility and understanding in the great work of feeding the flock. Even though Peter was an eyewitness of the suffering of Christ, he realized the suffering of his brethren also (1 Pet. 4:16). As a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed, he knew that all the faithful have a reservation in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4).

There is no evidence in the New Testament to support the Roman Catholic claim that Peter was the first pope. *The CBS New Almanac, 1978*, says: "Roman Catholicism is the form of Christianity practiced by those who recognize the authority of the pope—the bishop of Rome—as the successor of Peter and vicar of Christ on Earth."<sup>1</sup> Under the title, "The Popes," it says,

according to Roman Catholic doctrine Christ granted to Peter (Simon son of Jona) and to his successors primacy over the bishops of the church. As the representative of Christ on earth, Peter became leader of the Church and established his see in Rome about the year 42. Of Peter's life in Rome little is known, but it is fairly certain that he died in the city about 67. In 1968, the Vatican announced the discovery of Peter's alleged remains, buried under St. Peter's Cathedral.<sup>2</sup>

Peter is said to have established his see in Rome about the year 42 and ruled as first pope until his death about 67. However, notice the historical evidence in the Scripture that shows that Peter was not in Rome in the forties.

### **NO SEE ESTABLISHED IN ROME BY PETER IN A.D. 42**

Tracing Peter's ministry with Scriptures, locations, and approximate dates exposes the Catholic error of the primacy of Peter over the bishops and the establishment of his see in Rome in A.D. 42. There is no biblical evidence that Peter ever went to Rome.

1. Acts 1, Jerusalem, A.D. 33.
2. Acts 2-5, Jerusalem, A.D. 33.
3. Acts 8, Samaria, A.D. 35-36.
4. Acts 9, A.D. 37.
5. Acts 10, Caesarea, A.D. 41.
6. Acts 11-12, Jerusalem, A.D. 42-44.
7. Acts 15, Jerusalem, A.D. 50-51.

8. Galatians 1:18, Peter in Jerusalem.
9. Galatians 2, Peter in Antioch before A.D. 57.
10. 1 Corinthians 9:5, Peter still has a wife, A.D. 57.
11. Romans, no mention of Peter, A.D. 57-58.
12. Acts 28, Paul in Rome two years; no mention of Peter, A.D. 63-65.
13. 1 Peter 5:13, Peter in Babylon on Euphrates, A.D. 65.

Those who assume that Peter spent twenty-five years ruling as head of the church from Rome accept a tradition without any reliable evidence.

### **PETER, AN EXPERIENCED EXHORTER**

1. He had confessed the name of Christ (Mat. 16:18).
2. He had preached Christ as Lord (Acts 2:36).
3. He had endured persecution (Acts 4, 8, 12).
4. He cared about widows (Acts 6).
5. He complimented the work of others (Acts 8).
6. He restored the erring brother (Acts 8).
7. He broke down prejudice (Acts 10).
8. He helped resolve conflict (Acts 15).
9. He understood family duties (1 Cor. 9:5).
10. He left all to follow Christ (Mark 10:28-38).
11. He proclaimed the truth orally and in writing.
12. He confirmed the truth with signs and wonders.
13. He was penitent, correcting personal sins.
14. He was mercifully pleading for faithfulness.
15. He was a servant as an apostle and as an elder.

### **QUALIFIED ELDERS NEED EXHORTATION ALSO**

Peter recognizes these qualified elders and exhorts them to “feed the flock,” “take the oversight,” “be ensamples” to the flock. Specific scriptural qualifications must be met to serve as an elder/bishop/pastor in a local congregation. Even qualified men can become slack, negligent in their work and need “a fire” built under them. Elders are often discouraged by cantankerous members. For this reason sermons are needed to remind elders and members of their duty as servants. Qualified elders are to be respected and supported when they “rule well” (1 Tim. 5:17).

**1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7**

A man...(not a woman)  
 blameless  
 husband one wife  
 vigilant, sober  
 good behaviour  
 given to hospitality  
 apt to teach  
 not given to wine  
 no striker  
 not greedy  
 patient  
 not a brawler  
 not covetous  
 rules well his own house  
 children in subjection  
 not a novice  
 of good report without

**TITUS 1:5-9**

blameless  
 husband of one wife (married)  
 having faithful (believing) children  
 not unruly or self-willed  
 not soon angry  
 not given to wine  
 no striker  
 not given to filthy lucre  
 lover of hospitality  
 lover of good men  
 sober  
 just  
 holy  
 temperate  
 holding faithful word  
 able to exhort  
 convince gainsayers

Every qualification is necessary to some degree of spiritual maturity. Most of these qualities are also requirements in the life of a faithful Christian. Sinless perfection cannot be expected of elders or Christians (1 John 2:1-5); neither can we tolerate impenitence (Rom. 6:1-2; 1 John 1:6-10; 1 Tim. 5:19-20).

**MODERN ABUSES IGNORE THESE QUALIFICATIONS**

1. Women pastors/preachers, female elders.
2. Unmarried men.
3. Married men without believing children.
4. Unscripturally divorced and remarried men.
5. Money hungry entertainers.
6. Young men without maturity.
7. Must be college graduate.
8. Calling preacher/evangelist pastor.
9. One pastor rather than a plurality.
10. Those not selected from among local members.
11. Those overseeing more than one local church.
12. Deacons rule over local church.
13. Majority rule.
14. Failure to teach and encourage scriptural organization?

15. Prefer men's business meeting rather than eldership?
16. Denial of eldership's authority?
17. Undermine elders by false accusations?
18. One elder usurp authority of eldership?
19. Elders delegate authority to preacher to do their work?
20. Elders fail to lead by example becoming "lords"?

### **QUALIFIED ELDERS NEEDED "AMONG YOU" IN EVERY CONGREGATION**

Elders are important because they are a part of God's plan for the local church. In Philippians 1:1 Paul addresses "the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops [plural] and deacons [plural]." Paul told Titus to "ordain elders [plural] in every city" (Tit. 1:5). Elders (plural) are to be appointed in every congregation: "And when they had ordained them elders [plural] in every church" (Acts 14:23). There is no such thing in the Scriptures as "calling a pastor from one congregation to another" to oversee the work.

Elders/Bishops/Pastors (plural) are to be ordained:

1. In every city (Tit. 1:5).
2. In every church (Acts 14:23).
3. Qualified from among local members (1 Pet. 5:2).
4. Ordained to oversee one local congregation only.
5. Not called from one congregation to shepherd another.

Elders must not just be older men (physically); they must also be men who are older in the faith. Some have obeyed the gospel in a mature age but are unqualified because they are still novices (spiritually). All of God's qualifications for the work of everseeing the flock are set forth in First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-11. Those who would be ordained as an elder/pastor/bishop must meet these qualifications, or they cannot do the work required to please God. Godly Christian men are needed who understand the scriptural requirements and who will submit themselves with a burning desire to serve (1 Tim. 3:1).

### **ELDERS ARE EXHORTED TO WORK**

Elders/pastors/bishops are important because of the importance of their work (1 Tim. 3:1). Serving as an overseer of the church is not just a position, an honorary office, or a title. It is a work of service. Paul stated in First Timothy 3:1 that it is a "good work." Many times

it is a thankless job with a great deal expected and required. However, the momentary blessings are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed (Mark 10:28-30; 1 Pet. 5:4). Remember, there are elders around the throne of God (Rev. 4:4-11; 5:5-6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4) in heaven. All of God's servants look forward to the blessings of heaven.

Elders are to be:

E-xamples to the flock

L-eaders in righteousness

D-oers of the word

E-xhorters persuading the weak

R-ulers practicing discipline

S-oul-watchers preparing for eternity

### **ELDERS/PASTORS/BISHOPS ARE TO BE EXAMPLES NOT LORDS**

Elders are to be "ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). The attributes enjoined upon all Christians should be especially evident in elders: faith (2 Pet. 1:5; knowledge (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18); godly living (Tit. 2:11-12); loyalty to the truth (Heb. 10:24; Jude 3); and love (1 Cor. 13; 1 John 4:19-21). These men are forbidden to "lord it over" (from *katakurieuo*) the flock (1 Pet. 5:3). They should not treat members in a highhanded manner, possess a domineering spirit, or act autocratically, as did Diotrephes (3 John 9). When elders lead by righteous examples, members are obligated to follow and submit. It is not a matter of "do as I tell you"; it is rather a case of "follow and submit as I instruct and show you."

Elders do have delegated authority to "feed," "oversee," be an "example," "rule," "tend," and "watch for your souls." Thayer says *Episcopos* means "overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things done by others are done rightly."<sup>3</sup> This is the principal of authority, to make sure that things are done rightly by one's self and others. Elders must rule well their own house so they will be qualified to rule (care) for the church (1 Tim. 3:4-5). Children are to be in submission to the rule of parents (Eph. 6:1-4), and church members are to be in submission to the elders (Heb. 13:17; 1 The. 5:12; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

The authority is in the eldership, not in any one elder. The eldership has delegated authority through the Word to accomplish God's will.

Every obligation involves an element of expedience—human judgment. Within this area of expedience, in carrying out God’s will as it relates to the congregation, elders have the authority. Elders do not have authority to make laws, as God does, but they have authority to accomplish that which God decrees. Elders are to oversee, rule, shepherd the flock under the authority of Jesus and to be in submission to the Word with every fellow member. The power of a good example is the proper exercise of authority and is more effective than the mere exercise of authority (being a lord). Many lack respect for the authority of the eldership and teach error resulting in rebellion and division. Some claim that Christ has all authority; therefore, the elders have no authority. Others claim that the authority of the eldership is a traditional concept unauthorized in the Word of God. Many would say to rule only indicates management, direction, responsibility without any authority or required obedience on the part of the saints. These errors undermine the truth as revealed in the New Testament. Elders need to be aware of these deceptive devices.

### **ELDERS ARE TO BE LEADERS IN RIGHTEOUSNESS**

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Pet. 5:2). Elders must feed, tend (*poimaino*—“to shepherd; to care for the sheep”), and oversee the flock, which involves teaching, protecting, and discipline of members (Acts 20:28; 1 The. 5:12; Tit. 1:9-11; Heb. 13:17). To take the oversight (*episkopos*—“to superintend, oversee”), simply means to direct the congregation, make decisions, lead. They do not do it by constraint (because pressured or forced, as a burdened sense of duty), but out of love, faith, and of one’s own prayerful desire to serve. “Filthy lucre” refers to base or dishonorable financial gain. This admonition does not mean that an elder cannot be financially supported or reimbursed for expenses; he can (1 Tim. 5:17). Financial gain is not to be the basic motive for serving (1 Tim. 3:3).

### **ELDERS ARE TO BE DOERS OF THE WORD**

In Acts 20:28-31 it is clear that elders are charged to take heed, feed, watch, and remember to be doers/busy workers. They are to actively keep sound doctrine, exhorting, and convicting the gainsayers (Tit. 1:9). They are to watch diligently after the welfare of souls (Heb.

13:17), for they will give account. Elders are to heed James 1:22: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” Elders are to address problems—not ignore them (Acts 15:4). Elders will give an account of their stewardship (Heb. 13:17).

### **ELDERS ARE TO BE RULERS, OVERSEERS**

In Hebrews 13:17 we are told to “obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves.” “Rule” (Greek *hageomai*) means to lead, to preside, to govern, to rule, to be a chief officer. This work is one of leadership, oversight, rule, decision making. They do have God-ordained authority. Preachers/evangelists do not have scriptural authority to rule or oversee the local congregation; that duty belongs to the elders/pastors/bishops. For example, a missionary/evangelist who holds a revival has no authority over the local congregation; his work is to “preach the word” of God (2 Tim. 4:2-5).

### **ELDERS/PASTORS/BISHOPS ARE TO BE SOUL-WATCHERS**

Soul-watchers are concerned about preparation for eternity. They are to “take heed unto yourselves ” (Acts 20:28), and for the flock, “**for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account**” (Heb. 13:17). They are accountable to watch for dangers and to stop false teachers (Tit. 1:9-11). They are to prevent division, lest grievous wolves draw away disciples (Acts 20:28-32). They are to be shepherds of the local flock, watching for the welfare of souls under their care. Elders will give account unto God for the souls in their care.

### **AWAITING THE CHIEF SHEPHERD**

A great reward shall be received when Jesus returns for His faithful shepherds who have lovingly cared for His sheep (John 14:1-4). The parable of the sheepfold reveals Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10:14). The Hebrews writer referred to “the great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20). Elders are to see themselves as under-shepherds in submission to the “Chief Shepherd,” Christ. When Jesus returns the elders will give an account for the souls that were under their care (Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28). The sheep will give an account of their conduct toward the elders (Heb. 13:17), and toward the Chief Shepherd (Mat. 25:31-34; Heb. 9:27-28; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 The. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:11-15, 22:12-14; John 5:28-29).

## YE SHALL RECEIVE A CROWN OF GLORY

Elders are not to serve for material gain or personal popularity, but in view of the eternal reward of the righteous. The crown (*stephanos*) is the wreath worn by heroes and conquerors for faithful service. This crown was longed for by Paul, and proclaimed as attainable by all those that love the Lord's appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). This crown is a symbol of perpetuity and immortality in that it fades not away.

## LIKEWISE, YE YOUNGER, SUBMIT

Leaving the exhortation to the elders (overseers), a corresponding obligation rests upon all younger members of the church to respect spiritual maturity and be in subjection to Christ. Even if one is not qualified to serve as an elder, one has the responsibility to serve faithfully, using one's talent and abilities to bring glory to God (Mat. 25:14-30). Every member has an obligation to cooperate with the leadership in the church and to show respect for every elderly (aged) member (Lev. 19:32; 1 Tim. 5:1; Tit. 2:2-7). Submission is yielding one's self in love (1 Cor. 13) for the welfare of self, others, and the cause of Christ (Eph. 4:1-7). There are too many collisions because of a failure to properly yield (Rom. 6:16-18; 1 Cor. 1:10).

## BE SUBJECT ONE TO ANOTHER IN HUMILITY

Be subject means to voluntarily place oneself in subjection, be subordinate; thus, to humble oneself as a servant. Humility is to be the servant's garment. Even as the Lord washed the disciples feet (John 13:4-17), so we are to humble ourselves to serve one another. No task is too menial or lowly; no task is too small (Mark 9:41). The greatest in the kingdom is the servant of others (Mat. 20:26-28). God grants grace (His favor) upon those who humble themselves to become servants. Today, too many want to be served. They want to *get* rather than to *give* of themselves. However, God resisteth the proud and the spirit of self exaltation (Mat. 23:12). Let us all be humble servants.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Martin A. Bacheller, *CBS News Almanac 1978* (Maplewood, NJ: Hammond Almanac Inc., 1978), p. 885.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 890.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers And Authors, Inc., n.d.), p. 243.

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# QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS AND DEACONS

*W. Wayne Coats*



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## INTRODUCTION

Although the Bible has given specific instructions with reference to the qualifications of various workers, it is the case that some men have not been content to abide in the plans of Jehovah.

This can be seen beginning with the first pair who worked in Eden's garden. There were some specifics set forth in precise terms, but Satan intervened as a kind of helper and ruin resulted.

The work of elders and deacons is but another example of Almighty God using men especially qualified to perform given tasks. This has always been true. I cannot think of an occasion when Jehovah selected and called a bad man to do a good work, nor did He select a good man to perform evil works. Yes, I am aware of the fact that wicked nations were used to overthrow others who were extremely wicked, but God's plan is for good men to perform good deeds.

Although Jehovah requires crucial and exacting tasks, He requires a people sufficient in character to perform those tasks. Whatever qualities of life are commensurate with the performance of working for the Lord, we may rest assured that those qualities have been set forth by the Lord.

This means that there is a close correlation between action and attitude, tasks and thought. It will be our purpose in this study to keep focus upon this principle.

It is not our prescribed assignment to deal with the duties of elders and deacons, albeit the qualifications and duties are intertwined at some points. A person might be qualified in any number of areas but not perform in those areas. A man might be able to lead singing during a worship assembly, but he might not ever lead a song. I would think if he should desire to lead in the song service, he should be able to lead singing and he should have the good sense to lead songs which the congregation can sing.

A man might be qualified to preach the Gospel of Christ, both as to intellectual ability and morals, but he might decide to let someone else do the preaching. Of course a refusal to preach the Word is a blatant refusal to do what God commands. It is putting one's candle under a bushel instead of putting it on a candlestick to give forth light.

The preceding thoughts have been penned to show that there is some difference in being qualified for a work and performing the work.

Almighty God had sworn with an oath to Abraham when the promises were made (Acts 2:30). Someone was needed in order to carry out the land promises. No ordinary man was sufficient for the occasion. God selected Moses, who was the meekest man in all the earth, and laid upon him the solemn duty of leading the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan (Num. 12:3). There were a few times when rebels arose and attempted to usurp the authority which Jehovah invested in Moses (Num. 20:10). God did not qualify anyone in Egypt to lead His people except Moses.

When time came for the tabernacle to be constructed at Sinai, special men were set aside who would serve the people as they made their offerings to Jehovah.

One cannot help but be impressed as one reads the meticulous details given with respect to the demeanor of the priests who were helpers as appointed by the Lord. The Levites were to officiate in the offerings and worship before the Almighty. It is absurd to think that God would allow them to be casual in dress, morals, or work.

After the land of Canaan was conquered, the Israelites were ruled by judges for a number of years. We notice that the duties incumbent

upon the judges required certain qualities, which some were not always careful to observe. A much needed sermon could be given setting forth the principle that God has required and still requires very special people to perform and carry out His purposes. We see this in the selection of the twelve disciples.

Jesus' work was brief in time as He moved about preaching. He was training twelve men who would be sent out to carry on the unfinished work of the Lord. These men would not only be tutored by the Master but they would be further qualified by the Holy Spirit which would be given to them. He, the Spirit, would guide the apostles into all the truth (John 16:13). He would bring to their remembrance all things which Jesus had taught them (John 14:26). The twelve would be qualified, if they would abide in the truth which Jesus taught (John 15:1). Our Lord would not force any of those men to be faithful or endure to the end.

In the eternal purpose of God, the church of Christ would be built and it would show forth the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). The church of Christ is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23). She is altogether lovely as we observe her in her glory and pristine purity. Men ridicule the beautiful bride but people who respect the Word of God look at the church and see God's wisdom. Man's foolishness rejects God's wisdom.

The church in its universal sense has no earthly headquarters, human overseers, or universal creed to direct its affairs. Christ alone is head of the church (Col. 1:18).

The church, in its local sense, is plainly set forth in the Bible. Each local congregation was independent and separate from all others; each directed its own affairs. There was no such thing as a confederation of churches. All such conglomerates came as a result of grievous departures from the truth.

Each local congregation had its own organization consisting of qualified elders and deacons. Moreover each local unit was large enough to do everything required of Jehovah. A small group of people could meet together to worship God and they could also work for God. Such autonomy did not preclude cooperation between congregations.

## THE QUALITY OF ELDERS

Man is extremely naive when he thinks that God is more concerned with quantity than quality. Look around with honest objectivity and see the miserable excuses which so often parade as pastors. In recent years there has been an increasing effort to pad the rolls. Apparently some undoubtedly assume that the more shepherds there are, the better the flock will be tended. Is this logical? Does it really follow? The same senseless assumption holds true for making most anyone a deacon who can quote, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Substituting quantity for quality is not the only reason, but I can assure you that it is one of the reasons the church is in such a terrible mess. Does it ever cross our minds that shepherds will have to answer to the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4)? Does it occur that the elder is not **the chief**? Is it not the case that our blessed Lord is the **chief shepherd**? The Roman Pope is not the only papa who parades as Chief. Take a look and see for yourself.

Our Lord knew that the dark clouds of doom would hover about His faithful followers. In hushed silence they would have to cower together like animals trying to escape the enemy. Men of faith and courage would be needed who would be willing to die as they tried to tend and shepherd the flock of God among them. Meeting King Leo face to face in the Roman Coliseum would be but a prelude to meeting the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Stout men with strong faith would be tested with fire and sword, but they would be more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37).

God did not give a list of arbitrary qualifications to be discarded by a crew of heretics. Please read the entire books of Timothy and Titus with the purpose of seeing the conditions under which the elders and deacons would be working. The societal conditions would explain why special people would be needed to serve the cause of Christ. If anything, the moral index is even lower in our time than it was when Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus.

Are these special qualifications needed to help in the Lord's work? Some have contended that the elder passed along with the cessation of miraculous gifts. The assertion is made that certain elders were inspired, which of course is true (1 Pet. 5:1). The inspired elders were

to be called to pray for the sick (Jam. 5:14). It is assumed that with the passing of the gift of healing, the eldership also passed away.

The fallacy of this can be seen if we try to make the same point with reference to preachers and preaching. There were inspired preachers and they ceased. Shall we conclude that we do not need preachers? There were inspired letters written, but inspired writing ceased. Shall we do away with the Bible?

### SOME NEGATIVE POINTERS

As we ponder the qualifications of elders as given in First Timothy three and Titus one, we need to study each word most carefully. It can be seen that Timothy shows **seventeen** qualifications, and Titus shows **sixteen**. These are the same in some respects, but in some they differ.

We learn that the men who were to serve as elders were overseers, pastors, or shepherds (Acts 20:17, 28); bishops (Tit. 1:5-9); presbyters (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

A listing of these several qualifications will be as follows:

#### 1 Timothy 3

1. Desire
2. Blameless
3. Husband of one wife
4. Vigilant
5. Sober
6. Good behavior
7. Hospitable
8. Apt to teach
9. No winebibber
10. No striker
11. Not greedy of filthy lucre
12. Patient
13. No brawler
14. Not covetous
15. Rules his house & children
16. Not a novice
17. Good report from without

#### Titus 1

1. Blameless
2. Husband of one wife
3. Having faithful children
4. Blameless
5. Not self-willed
6. Not soon angry
7. Not given to wine
8. No striker
9. Not greedy of filthy lucre
10. Lover of hospitality
11. Lover of good men
12. Sober
13. Just
14. Holy
15. Temperate
16. Holding fast the faithful word

It will be observed in the foregoing list that Timothy lists six negative qualifications and Titus gives five. These are shown below.

**Timothy**

1. Not given to wine
2. No striker
3. Not greedy of filthy lucre
4. No brawler
5. Not covetous
6. Not a novice

**Titus**

1. Not given to wine
2. No striker
3. Not guilty of filthy lucre
4. Not self-willed
5. Not soon angry

Timothy mentions three negative qualifications which are not given by Titus and they are: no brawler, not covetous, and not a novice. Titus gives two negative qualifications which are not given by Timothy and they are: not self-willed, and not soon angry. Altogether there are eight negative qualifications which we will consider.

**Not Given To Wine**

A shepherd must not be given to wine. In a society which is staggering under the influence of intoxicating liquors of every description, no Christian should enfeeble his brain with alcohol. Not only does strong drink impair the brain but one's influence is destroyed by the foul stench of wine.

For one to clamor that social drinking is all right is but a demonstration of one's fermented ignorance. Drinking, drunkenness and its attendant evils is the most unsociable thing a human can engage in. There is no intelligent reason for anyone to become a winebibber.

**Not A Striker**

The elder must not be "a striker." This forbids a man being quarrelsome and pugnacious. If there is anywhere on earth a striker can find someone with whom to quarrel and fight, it would be in some of our congregations. Some brethren are not contented unless they can cause a church fuss. Books have been written by such fakers as Lynn Anderson in which the pattern for causing trouble is actually parroted. Dissension, unrest, strife, and discord is recommended as a means of capturing congregations for the liberal cause. This is mean, devilish, and diabolical; yet some brethren will actually support such con-artists.

One does not have to literally strike others in order to stand condemned. Anderson, et al., brazenly encourage discontent in order to change the church into a cult. This is done in spite of the fact that the Bible teaches every Christian to be a peacemaker.

A striker causes trouble among brethren. One of his tactics is to be a cowardly sneak. Imagine an elder crawling around, groveling, and fawning to be one thing while getting ready to strike his blows for the devil and his imps. Do you want case histories?

The S.S. troops of Hitler and the KGB thugs of Stalin were Sunday school boys compared to some of the conniving liberal elders who contrive to destroy the peace and harmony of some congregations. How can men be so two-faced and patterned after Judas Iscariot the traitor? How can brethren be conniving while at the same time following after things which make for peace and things whereby we may edify one another (See 1 The. 5:11)?

### **Not Greedy of Filthy Lucre**

A faithful shepherd will not be greedy of filthy lucre. When money is the price for doing wrong, it becomes filthy. Money can be sought when none is due, and it then becomes filthy. Money can be sought in an excessive manner over and beyond a reasonable gain, and it becomes filthy. It is still true that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

It would be well to go back to some of the cases which were written in the Bible and preach on these matters repeatedly. The temptation still exists for elders to pad their pockets with filthy lucre. In some cases they may be trying to stay a wee bit ahead of the preacher and others.

When the Israelites went over to subdue Jericho, they were forbidden to keep the silver, gold, and vessels of brass and iron (Jos. 6:19). Achan, with a greedy heart, took some of the items which were forbidden (Jos. 7:20-21). The poor fellow was stoned to death and burned with fire as a result of his sin. An avaricious, parsimonious, penurious, miserly, greedy, rapacious heart is totally different from the example of our Lord.

Who does not know about old Balaam? Balak desired Balaam to curse the children of God (Num. 22:6). Like some of our modern prophets who say one thing and act just the opposite, Balaam was a pure hypocrite. The lure of lucre was too great for the prophet.

In just a short while, we see the weak and wobbling Balaam up on the high places of Baal offering sacrifices with Balak. In a subsequent battle Balaam was killed, and his wages of unrighteousness were of

no value (2 Pet. 2:15). Running greedily for reward was the wrong race for the prophet (Jude 11).

Read slowly and carefully the account of Gehazi as found in Second Kings 5:20-27. Here is a sorry situation depicted in the life of a man who was greedy of filthy lucre. The lucre in hand turned Gehazi into a leper white as snow. All the coveted materials which were received could not rid Gehazi of the leprosy. A slow, painful death would result.

It is somewhat negative to speak of Judas Iscariot who professed such great love for his Lord, but, like many, the disciple allowed lucre to replace the Lord. Thirty pieces of silver was a paltry price for the Savior, but isn't it true that some professed followers will barter for much less?

Think of the preceding cases and consider the horrible company an elder keeps when he succumbs to the temptation of being greedy of filthy lucre. Moreover, think of the final wages to be received.

### **Not a Brawler**

The world has never had as many brawlers as exists in our time. The news media seems to have little time or interest in describing the good which occurs, and so much effort and space is given to all the brawling episodes which occur over the world. A brawler is a fighter, an insurrectionist, given to strife and friction, a rebel against that which is right. To people of good sense he is contentious, belligerent, quarrelsome, wranglesome, controversial, disagreeable, stubborn, and repulsive.

An elder may find himself trying to fill the role of a peacemaker when church brawls develop. If he is a brawler, in all likelihood a congregation will stay stirred up; a brawling elder will not be able to help the situation.

I have traveled extensively during the past few years, and everywhere I go, the report is the same. Congregations are splitting in so many places. Trouble is the rule instead of the exception. The picture is indeed pessimistic and who is to blame?

Brother Guy N. Woods declared that, wherever he went to conduct meetings, the picture was gloomy indeed. How tragic for such conditions to exist! Elders can stop this sordid situation if they will measure up to their full strength.

Do the thoughts presented above mean that elders cannot be strong soldiers and fight the good fight of faith? Of course not! Elders may be called upon to face a gang of brawlers, and if such occurs, they must earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3). They dare not give place, no not for an hour (Gal. 2:5). They must resist the devil (Jam. 4:7). The thing desired by all the liberal brawlers is for all brethren to meekly turn and run, and so many are doing just that.

### **Not Covetous**

Books have been written which show the sorry attitude of people who are covetous. An elder must not be covetous, for to be so is to be guilty of idolatry (Col. 3:5). It is very difficult to turn people away from idolatry.

The apostle Paul wrote to various brethren and warned them of covetousness. To the Romans he declared, "Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. 13:9). To Corinth, he wrote, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous...with such an one no not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:11). To the Ephesians, Paul wrote, "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (Eph. 5:3). To the Colossians, Paul declared, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth...and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). The sin of covetousness is condemned throughout the Bible, and no shepherd can afford to succumb to this horrible sin.

### **Not A Novice**

A bishop must not be a novice. Sometimes the novice is equated with a rookie or amateur. Informally, he might be referred to as a sort of armchair quarterback. He is a new convert, or one newly planted as a tree.

The novice aspiring to be a bishop could be compared to a little sprout or sapling standing by a giant redwood. There is some difference. It is an established fact that some people cannot hold a mite of authority. Elders do have authority, ruling responsibilities, and this causes some little people to be lifted up with pride. Such people completely miss the entire purpose of being a shepherd. Our Lord spoke

of Himself as a shepherd (John 10:11). He certainly was not puffed up with pride but scathingly denounced such an attitude.

### **Not Self-Willed**

The elder must never be afflicted with a self-willed attitude. This demonstrates itself in stubbornness and will wreck a congregation. A man must never relent when the truth of God is at stake. There is that concerning which a man must be immovable (1 Cor. 15:58). On all occasions when self-will and God's will are at opposite sides of the spectrum, self-will usually prevails.

This is the little end of the tap root of all troubles caused by liberal brethren. Self means more than the Savior. No one ever heard a self-willed shepherd sincerely sing, "Saviour more than life to me, I am clinging, clinging, close to thee."

Like so many hurtful attitudes which elders might possess, self-will springs from excessive pride (2 Kin. 17:14). A self-willed person refuses to walk after God (Neh. 9:17; Psa. 78:10). Such an one refuses to hear the messengers of God (1 Sam. 8:19; Jer. 44:16; Zec. 7:11). The self-willed person refuses correction (Jer. 5:3; 7:28). We need to be warned against this terrible sin which seems to be so prevalent (Heb. 3:7-12; Pro. 29:1; Jer. 31:18; Deu. 21:21).

### **Not Soon Angry**

The last negative quality to be considered is "not soon angry." Who can believe that any normal shepherd can work with all kinds of recalcitrant sheep and never become upset? A person would be unfit as a shepherd if a complete and total affable spirit prevailed when sheep garb themselves as wolves or when wolves try to look like sheep. I believe my Lord would turn some tables over and skin some sheep. Jesus would not tolerate evil men.

The elder must be the very epitome of patience, but at the same time there must be a time and place for forbearance and patience to stop. Such was the case in Corinth where "wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults," existed and, of course, were condemned (2 Cor. 12:20). Wrath, strife, sedition, anger and such like are works of the flesh and will keep one out of heaven (Gal. 5:19-20).

Bitterness, wrath, strife, anger, and clamor must be put away (Eph. 4:26-27). The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God (Jam. 1:20).

Each of the negative qualifications considered in the preceding pages will be absent as good men try to be the kind of shepherds which please the Lord. The ultimate purpose will be to live so as to bask in the light of the Savior's love eternally.

## POSITIVE QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

### Introduction

In our preceding lesson we studied the negative qualifications of shepherds, but in this lesson we will study the positive characteristics which elders should exemplify. It would be highly presumptuous to claim that we are giving the last word about elders. Great, good and godly men have differed in their views as to the specifics relative to the eldership. Perhaps we can stimulate study and provoke thought in an area which has been neglected in some localities.

In researching materials outside the Bible (which is not a mortal sin), I have been intrigued with what so many men have conjured up about the elders and their qualifications. In the old issues of *Gospel Advocate*, there have been over 600 articles written about the elders. Hopefully we can steer our way through the maze of uninspired materials and be guided by the inspired Word in all that we write or speak.

A complete and thorough study of all the positive qualifications of elders would of itself require many days. We will be able in one short lesson to give only a cursory glance at the vast amount of materials set forth in the Bible. With some of the qualifications we will not spend much time, but with others we will tarry a bit. This seems to be a necessity borne out of time and space.

The number of positive qualifications is not of tremendous importance. It is what inheres within the qualification which would enable a shepherd to function as he should. This is that which is up front and which truly counts.

In looking at the beautiful graces which should adorn the lives of elders, I like to compare them to a marvelous cluster of grapes which, when carried on men's shoulders, reach all the way to the ground.

### Desire

The elder must desire the work of a bishop (1 Tim. 3:1). I know the theory about congregations making an elder out of a non-elder when the non-elder does not desire to be an elder. This makes as little sense as making a preacher out of a man who doesn't want to be a preacher,

a song leader out of a person who doesn't desire to be a song leader, or a Bible teacher out of a person who does not want to teach.

I have seen brethren refuse to lead a public prayer when called on during worship services. It never did occur to me that we should dismiss the service for a brief recess while begging the brother to get ready to desire to pray.

It is an honorable thing for a man to desire to serve his Lord honorably. Good elders must have a pure, holy, righteous desire, motivated by the supreme purpose of helping others to go to heaven. All else is folly.

A young man desires to become a gospel preacher and we encourage him. He needs all the help we can give. His desire must be based upon one thing—to please the Lord regardless of what might happen.

We rejoice when our young men express a desire to study the rudiments of music and become effective song leaders. Most any fool can act like a clown or some entertaining simpleton, but people of good sense will not tolerate such perverted desires. When we serve the Lord our hearts must be pure if we expect to go to heaven (Mat. 5:8).

It is good and biblical for a man of maturity and excellent biblical qualities to desire to serve as a shepherd. We admire and esteem such good men very highly. No man is so low and to be despised as the person who has a perverted, self-centered, conniving desire to become a lord-like bishop.

### **Blameless**

Both Timothy and Titus tell us that a bishop must be blameless. Who is sufficient for such a role, considering the life and work to be exemplified? The overseers of the flock will need to stand at the door when wolves of every species try to enter. They can stand with undaunted faith and have no fears when they are under attack. Let not the enemy have an advantage of being able to sustain any evil charges. Such tactics serve well among petty politicians, but elders are not political pawns.

### **Husband Of One Wife**

Both Timothy and Titus state that a shepherd must be the husband of one wife. Is it the case that the Holy Spirit is simply negating polygamy in the divine directive? Some brethren have so affirmed. Of

course, a shepherd should not have a harem of heifers while trying to lead sheep.

Is it the case that the Holy Spirit is not prohibiting celibacy among the elders? Some brethren have so affirmed. I readily concede that some unmarried men are much better Christians than some married brethren. This proves nothing, however, with respect to the issue. Some young spinsters are far superior as Christians than some preachers or elders, but that is not the point.

Behind the qualification looms the work and service which will be performed. A boy living with his mama will learn that living with a wife is a wee bit different. I am trying to say that an old bachelor's life experiences are different from the life of a man who leads about a wife (1 Cor. 9:5). If an unmarried man is as qualified to serve as a shepherd over a flock as the married man, then the Holy Spirit could have very simply found such a word as bachelor and used it.

### **Vigilant**

The shepherd must be vigilant. A book needs to be written on this subject and placed in the hands of every elder. A great many of them would trash it if I wrote such a volume. We need to be reminded about the shepherds who refused to watch over the flock and who stubbornly rejected the warnings of faithful prophets such as Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos, and others. Warnings were ignored, and prophets were stoned while hireling shepherds reclined on ivory couches.

Why will we refuse to learn? How can we read the Bible and stare at the word *vigilance* and blink like hoot owls? Shepherds must be vigilant? Everyone knows that the sheep will come home dragging their tails behind them so why bother Bo-Peep shepherds who are fast asleep under the haystacks of ignorance, indifference, laziness, and unconcern?

There are so many things which can occur and which demand that elders be vigilant. The devil is always on the prowl searching for lambs; shepherds must be alert and awake. They need to know about the wiles of the devil. All the subterfuge, cunning, and deceit will be used to devour the flock. From among the elders men of perverse minds will arise and not spare the flock (Acts 20:28-30).

Elders must keep wolves away instead of inviting them in. Shepherds need to know which preachers are false brethren to keep them

away from the flock (Gal. 2:4; 2 Cor. 11:26). I am amazed how some church members, including elders, can be so ignorant as to what is happening in the church. Liberalism and modernism is spreading like wildfire, while sleepy brethren continue to slumber. How often do I hear, "We just didn't know." I did not know either until I had enough interest, concern, care, and energy to try to keep abreast of matters.

If there is no devil, hell or punishment, there is no need for vigilance (1 Pet. 5:8). It is still true that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. Congregations and schools are being stolen because elders refuse to open their eyes. I marvel at the utter density which reigns as a black pall over so many congregations.

### **Sober**

When the Holy Spirit declared that an elder must be sober, he simply meant that the shepherd must have a superior amount of common sense coupled with a well-balanced mind. He does not have reference to someone who refuses to become a drunken sot. The sober person obviously keeps his mind clear and alert. In fact, the Bible directs, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober" (1 Pet. 1:13). Titus was to teach young men to be sober minded (Tit. 1:6). We can see how being sober relates to the mind. Paul wrote, "Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 The. 5:6). He further wrote, "But let us, who are of the day, be sober" (1 The. 5:8).

To Titus, Paul gave instructions to teach the aged men to be sober (Tit. 2:2). The young women were to be sober (Tit. 2:4). All were to live soberly (Tit. 2:12).

Peter warned that the end of all things is at hand; therefore be sober (1 Pet. 4:7). He further coupled soberness with vigilance (1 Pet. 5:8). I simply do not understand how some elders can be so frivolous, silly, clownish, credulous, nonsensical, foolish, ridiculous, inane, irrational, incompetent, mindless, shallow, sappy, obtuse, doltish, infantile, frivolous, giddy, and at times just plain stupid. Do you need examples? Such dim misfits makes us appreciate, praise, and honor those wonderful brethren who are sober-minded. We esteem dearly, with an unflinching love, such faithful brethren who keep a sober mind and a steady hand while tending the flock of God.

### Of Good Behavior

A bishop must be a man of good behavior. This is the opposite of being boorish, rough, uncouth, and discourteous. Can you possibly imagine a Syrian shepherd being mean-spirited or cruel to the little lambs which they guard? Does he not cradle the little creatures in his arms while they doze in peaceful sleep? The good shepherd behaves himself because he cares deeply for the sheep. If even one is lost, he leaves the ninety-nine and searches for the lost sheep (Mat. 18:12-13). His love for them is so obvious that the sheep will hear and follow the shepherd (John 10:27).

The good behavior of an elder or shepherd is demonstrated in its most sacrificial manner as the good and faithful shepherd willingly lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11, 15). It seems that this is very different from the attitude of hireling shepherds who lead the sheep into the slaughter of liberalism. God help us to have elders who will behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15).

### Hospitality

Since the influence of a shepherd extends beyond the bounds of a local congregation, that influence should not be confined to the mere sheepfold where the shepherd serves. Perhaps the best example which we can follow is that of the good Samaritan who demonstrated hospitality in a time of dire need (Luke 10:33).

In the first century a motel could not be found in every hamlet or village; so brethren were faced with taking care of sojourners. The Hebrew brethren were admonished to: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2). To the church at Rome, Paul instructed the brethren to be "given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13). Peter wrote, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Pet. 4:9).

The spirit of hospitality is one of congeniality, cordiality, neighborliness, and friendliness. This should not be so costly as to bankrupt a bishop. Far out on the edge of the great desert in the Middle East, a very imposing sign had been erected which said, "Hospitality can be so easy. Drink Coca Cola." Around the world one company is known for its hospitality slogan. Christians can be known and read of all men when we are willing to part with a cup of cold water to assist those

who are athirst. Hospitality can be so easy when we delight in being hospitable.

### **Patient**

No person can serve as an elder in an effective manner without being totally and completely saturated with patience. This is no job for a fireball dude. There will be those whose zeal will greatly surpass their knowledge and in such cases a gentle, patient, shepherd is needed.

There will be sheep who wander afar out on the mountains of sin and instead of knocking them in the head with a mallet, with patience some of them can be returned to the flock.

The patience needed by an elder will be seen in a calm, imperturbable, enduring, unruffled, even-tempered attitude. When members of the church misbehave, the elders must not remonstrate in kind, but be mindful that every soul is precious in God's sight. It is no time to flare up, lose control of self, fume, rage, rant, and become boisterous, or have a temper tantrum. All of this is exactly what the devil desires, and he will cause it to happen if he can.

Our Lord exemplified patience and he also taught patience. He declared, "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Luke 21:19). We are to run with patience the race set before us (Heb. 12:1). In our faith we are to supply patience (2 Pet. 1:6). It seems that patience is one of those rare virtues which may be passing with the decades, but it must be practiced by those whose purpose is to get to heaven.

### **Ruleth Well His Own House**

Inasmuch as part of the duty of a bishop is to rule over the house of God, then of course one must be qualified. As a prerequisite to ruling over the congregation, one must be able to rule his own house in a befitting manner. I do not understand how this could be done if a man does not have a family. It is begging the question to say that **if** a man has a family, he must rule well. The experience with the family is the criteria for determining whether the man would be able to take care of the church of God. "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim. 3:5).

To contend that a bachelor would be able to rule as an elder (because he ruled himself as a family of one) would not convince thinking people. There are various views presented with respect to elders and their children. Here again the view is set forth that shepherds do

not have to have children, but if they do have children, the children must be in subjection. Again, there are those who insist that one child is sufficient, whereas others contend that there must be a plurality of children.

I do not believe the Holy Spirit is at all concerned about whether a man is able to beget children. Even morons can become fathers, but they would not suffice as shepherds. Again we are faced with the expression, "if a man know not how." Then we ask the question, "How does he come to know how?" He comes to know how by the experience of a family. This is exactly the point made by the Holy Spirit. If we want a man to learn how to rule, let him learn to rule at home and this knowledge based upon experience with his own family can be utilized and demonstrated in the work of a shepherd.

Should a shepherd have no sheep, one sheep or more than one sheep? Would a shepherd gain essential knowledge and experience acting as a shepherd when there were no sheep to shepherd? I believe we would urge that some experience with actual sheep would be a necessity.

Would the work of dealing with a plurality of sheep consisting of various and sundry temperaments, tastes, preferences, and dispositions be the same as working with one sheep? If anyone thinks that the problems, difficulties, challenges, situations, mountains, and valleys experienced with only one child are the same as those conditions seen in a plurality of children, one needs to get some expert help.

Since a shepherd will be working with a flock within a local congregation, all the helpful experience which he can possibly get in a family unit will help tremendously. The household, or family, is the training ground for the shepherd.

I am as aware as anyone that a man could possibly have no children and be able to work with a congregation in a more acceptable manner than some men who have a house full of offspring. Moreover, it is also possible that a man with a plurality of children might be able to do a much better work as an elder because of his work with his family.

In all situations we must strive for peace (Rom. 14:19). There is never an instance where we should give occasion to the adversary (1 Tim. 5:14).

### **Good Report Of Them Which Are Without**

It is a fact that those without are very critical of those within; for this and other reasons the elder must guard his manner of life. He must have a good report from those without. We must realize that there are some heathens outside the church who would never say a good word about any Christian. I doubt that our Lord would expect of us more than that which He experienced.

When those outside look at a faithful Christian, especially a godly elder, they should be able to see a candle on a candlestick instead of under a bushel. They should be able to know about the good light which shines before men. Christians do shine as lights in the world (Phi. 2:15). We are the children of light (1 The. 5:5). We walk in the light (1 John 1:7). We are to be light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8). The Christian puts on the armor of light (Rom. 13:12). The saints in light will receive an inheritance (Col. 1:12).

By living according to the light of God's Word, an elder may be able to influence someone outside of Christ to become a Christian.

### **Apt To Teach**

It seems fitting that we should save the matter of being "apt to teach" until the last, as we discuss the positive qualifications written to Timothy. I doubt that there is any one quality more deficient among elders in general than the ability to teach.

One does not need to travel the nation and do a statistical analysis of the capabilities of elders in general. One can look at the outrageous mess which is so evident all over the country; the final blame lies at the foot of elders. Members of the flock, including preachers, are not to usurp authority of elders. I have no desire whatsoever to deprecate any man who sincerely respects the Word of God, but utter contempt hangs in my crop for elders who sell out to the devil and his liberal imps in order to be popular. Political expediency seems to be the name of the game in so many places. The situation is alarming and extremely acute.

When will elders get back to their work of overseeing the flock as the Bible teaches? When will elders take seriously the matter of being apt to teach? To be apt suggests that one be intelligent, informed, knowledgeable, discerning, wise, discriminating, alert, shrewd, judicious, rational, thoughtful, reflectful, and overflowing with common

sense. The expression conveys the ability to teach the Word of God effectively and faithfully. One who is apt to teach is also willing to teach.

The world is headed for hell and destruction, and the remedy is teaching the simple truth of God's Word. We ought to be good teachers (Heb. 5:12). Why should Christians need to be begged to learn what to teach and how to teach?

One who is apt to teach not only knows what to teach but he is willing to teach. It is the case that some people are willing to teach, but they are grossly ignorant of the Bible. Others are knowledgeable in the Scriptures but are not willing to teach.

With so many heretics, false brethren, church troublers and wolves on the prowl, shepherds need to strive diligently in order to be apt to teach.

We will give a brief look at the six positive characteristics which are given by Paul to Titus which are not listed in Timothy.

### **Lover Of Good Men**

It is certain that the kind of people a Christian man loves most is the kind of people with which one will mingle and travel. If one chooses to socialize with evil companions, it is a fact that one's influence for good will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:33). We must shun the very appearance of evil (1 The. 5:22). Good men will help us whereas evil men will hurt us.

### **Just**

An elder must be a just man. Perhaps a few descriptive terms will help to understand better how a just man walks. A truly just man is straight, upright, not curved, candid, reliable, unequivocal, honest, equitable, ethical, fair, legitimate and lawful. No Christian should have any problem living a just life. The world needs just men as never before.

### **Holy**

Holy men of God can make a difference not only in the church of Christ but in the world which is all but devoid of holy influences. The ultimate goal of every Christian is to attain to that degree of perfect holiness which characterizes our Father in heaven. Such perfection will be reached only in heaven. We must ever strive to be a holy priesthood and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). God is holy, and we are to

make every effort to be like God (1 Pet. 1:16). God hath called us unto holiness (1 The. 4:7). We desire to be presented holy and unblameable in God's sight at the judgment (Col. 1:22; 1 The. 3:13).

To be holy is to be healthy as a Christian. Others may choose to be sickly and enjoy their conditions, but only a spiritually well and healthy person will please God.

### **Temperate**

A shepherd must be temperate. That means that one must be given to moderation, not excessive, not inordinate, not extravagant, not overindulgent, not excessive, but use self-control.

When Paul preached to a pagan ruler, he reasoned of temperance (Acts 24:25). When one follows the teaching of the Holy Spirit as set forth in the Bible, one is temperate (Gal. 5:23). We are to add to our faith temperance or self-control (2 Pet. 1:6). If we would gain the crown, we must be temperate (2 Cor. 9:25).

The good shepherd knows that the sheep will be observing his manner of life and he will carefully measure each step.

### **Holding Fast The Faithful Word**

No man can serve the Lord without holding fast to the faithful Word. Every kind of attitude which the devil can exhibit is hurled against the Word of God. The atheist curses the Bible whereas the liberal brother handles it loosely. There is not one iota of difference in them. Can you imagine a fellow claiming to be somewhat when he takes great liberties with the word of God? Look at the preacher who presumes to explain away anything which does not suit his agenda. This is the wildest sort of disrespect which is running rampant throughout so many congregations.

Like a deadly cancer, liberalism is destroying the work of Christ because elders will not hold fast the faithful Word. The gainsayers need to be convicted (Tit. 1:9). The mouths of false brethren need to be shut and shepherds can do this if they will. When brethren refuse to do what God teaches, we might as well take down the sign, fold the tent, and slink away like animals.

If anything in this world is worth holding on to, it is surely the eternal Word. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of God will not (Mat. 24:35). We must hold fast that which is good (1 The. 5:21). We are to hold fast the form of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13). Christians

are to hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Heb. 3:6). We must hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (Heb. 10:23).

To Thyatira, Jesus said, "But that which ye have already hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:25). To Sardis, He declared, "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast" (Rev. 3:3). To Philadelphia, Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

Can we not see why elders should hold fast to the Word of God? Is there no danger? Will the church ever be victorious when the Word of God is rejected so freely?

We love and appreciate good, sound, scriptural shepherds. They are esteemed highly in love for their works' sake. About the only pay faithful shepherds receive from some people is criticism. Let us reserve such for the counterfeits, who serve themselves rather than the cause of Christ. When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, faithful shepherds will be welcomed into the everlasting kingdom of our blessed Lord (1 Pet. 5:4).

## QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS

### Introduction

It was pointed out while discussing the qualifications of elders that we were not necessarily dealing with their duties. It was also observed that at times their qualifications and duties would overlap. This is the case as we study the qualifications of deacons. Whatever their duties, there must be the essential elements of character and life which will enable deacons to do the work assigned to them.

The deacon is described as a servant, waiter, attendant, or minister. He is one who runs, hastens, or kicks up the dust. The word is applied to various persons according to the Bible. As we consider some of these persons, it will help us to understand more clearly why some of the specific qualifications are given.

1. Waiters at festive events are deacons. Jesus said, "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Mat. 23:11). At the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, the supply of wine was gone. Jesus' mother, "saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do *it*" (John 2:5). "When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which

drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom” (John 2:9). We note here active service performed by (deacons) servants. A deacon must be qualified to perform special services.

Jesus said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour” (John 12:26). The deacon serves the Lord and is honored.

2. The Apostles were referred to as deacons—i.e., servants or ministers. Paul asked, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” (1 Cor. 3:5). He also wrote, “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” (2 Cor. 3:6). “But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses” (2 Cor. 6:4).

3. The wife of Zebedee wanted a special position for her two sons. She tried to play politics with Jesus, but He rebuffed her and said,

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mat. 20:26-28).

The minister or deacon is content to be a servant, even as the Son of Man served by giving His life as a ransom.

Perhaps no more vivid lesson could have been given than that which Jesus gave when He took a little child into His arms and said, “If any man desire to be first, *the same* shall be last of all, and servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

4. Some of the faithful preachers and workers in the early church were referred to as deacons or ministering servants. Paul wrote, “But that ye also may know my affairs, *and* how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things” (Eph. 6:21).

The Apostle wrote about, “Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ” (Col. 1:7). He also referred to Timothy as, “our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ” (1 The. 3:2). Timothy would be a good minis-

ter if he would, “put the brethren in remembrance of these things” (1 Tim. 4:6).

5. The civil magistrate is spoken of as a servant (deacon) of God. Paul declared, “For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:4). Of course the civil officer who ministers is not the deacon who serves in the church of Christ.

Our Lord is spoken of as a “minister [deacon] of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers” (Rom. 15:8). “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister [servant—deacon] of sin? God forbid” (Gal. 2:17).

Even the devil has his horde of deacons (ministers). Paul wrote, “Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:15).

We have taken the time and space to show how the concept of deacon is presented in a generic sense. In studying each of the verses given we can learn much about the need for the servant, minister, deacon to be qualified for whatever task he might need to perform.

We must make it clear that the generic use of the term does not cover the qualifications and requirements which must be found in the lives of that special class of servants who follow in the footsteps of our Lord.

When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he addressed all the saints “with the bishops and deacons” (Phi. 1:1). In his first letter to Timothy, the apostle set forth the qualifications for deacons. This proves that the deacons had special duties which required special qualifications. Although a civil magistrate might be a servant, deacon, minister, he surely would not qualify as a deacon in the church because he served in the world. If such were true, even the servants of the devil would be able to be “church deacons.”

It was no slip of the pen when Paul wrote of the deacons, “And let these also first be proved” (1 Tim. 3:10). How would that be done? What would the credentials be? How long would the examination continue? What would they do after selection that they did not do before? Whatever answers might be given to these questions it is cer-

tain that standards of conduct and service would be utilized as guideposts which would keep misfits from serving as special servants

Like astute and concerned people before momentous decisions are to be made, great effort and energy is expended in weighing every facet of the matter before the final word is given. If a man is considering the purchase of a farm, it is needful to go examine, prove, and investigate what the farm is like. It is in this respect that would-be deacons are to be proven.

There are several Bible cases which demonstrate the idea of trying, examining, showing to be genuine, and proving people. Time will not be wasted in exploring all of these situations. With each example let us keep our focus on the fact that brethren are to be proven, tested, tried, and determined to be genuine Christians before they are to be appointed as deacons.

While Israel was wandering toward Canaan the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no" (Exo. 16:4).

When Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land he did not drive out all the nations as God commanded. The nations which remained were used by Jehovah to, "prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep *it*, or not" (Judges 2:22).

"And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions" (1 Kin. 10:1).

When Jesus gave the parable of the great invitation, He told of a man who had to go prove some oxen (Luke 14:19). Apparently the oxen would be put to the test, examined, and checked to see if they were of value.

To the church at Corinth, Paul admonished the brethren, "to prove the sincerity of your love" by abounding in the grace of giving (2 Cor. 8:8).

With this little excursion in the matter of proving men for the appointment of deacons, we will consider the qualities to be seen in the life of a deacon.

### **Qualifications: Positive And Negative**

There are twelve qualifications which good men should have as deacons. Four of the twelve are qualities which are to be seen in the wives of deacons. There are four negative qualifications and eight which are positive. Some of the qualifications of deacons are the same as required of elders.

#### **Not Double-tongued**

The deacon is not to be double-tongued, and I suspect we know what that means. A quaint expression has been handed down which states, “White man speak with forked tongue.” This is true of man, regardless of the color of his skin. We have no appreciation for a person who engages in double talk. This spirit is one of deception and springs from a wicked heart.

One sees the double-tongued preacher at his best when he alternates between the conservative and liberal groups. When with the liberals, he is fluffy as a pillow, but look at him when he is among conservative brethren and appears as invincible as granite. Note carefully the double-tongued sneak when a big, affluent church with a large tub of butter begins to search for a preacher. Is the church conservative, moderate, or liberal? The polka-dotted, political pastor will announce his candidacy and run for the office. He can wear pink, purple, or yellow to match his brand of faith—which is determined by where he is located.

The double-tongued person can alternate between two contradictory positions without even a wheeze. Like a band director swinging his hands in all directions, so is the tongue of some of our greatest brethren. The tragedy is compounded by the fact that so many brethren neither know or care that the double-tongued shyster is very much alive among us.

The double-tongued person is a deceitful person, and the deceitful person works for the devil. He is the offspring of Judas Iscariot who tried to preach out of both sides of his mouth. He is like the preacher who is trying his best to change the congregation into a liberal church by playing dirty politics with elders. The old elders are to be ousted and some young ones are to be voted in. Line up the voters; recruit every whore, fornicator, deadbeat, and devil-worshipper. A double-

tongue is all that is needed. Get the lead elder to say “I’m a liberal, but I have to talk like a conservative.”

The double-tongued person is an inveterate liar. His speech and his life is a sordid mixture of contradictions. He possesses a devil’s head and heart but wears a mask which any sensible person can discover with a little effort.

Who is a liar but one who contrives to deceive? What is a double-tongue but one which is bent to deceive? Who does the double-tongued person serve? He serves his father the devil who is a liar (John 8:44). The subtle deceit is of the devil (Acts 13:10).

If every double-tongued brother died before dark, the boost for liberalism would be eliminated. Of course the devil would hatch out a new litter of liberals as soon as possible.

### **Not Given To Wine**

The deacon must not be given to wine. We have dealt with this matter while studying the qualifications of elders. The use of intoxicates is strictly forbidden by our God.

We are well aware of the fact that wine was sometimes referred to as the pure juice of the grapes which was extracted. In Palestine, vineyards have been cultivated for centuries. The fruit of the vine was a very important part of the culture in the middle east. Many metaphors are given in the Bible relative to grapes.

The use of fermented wine was forbidden to the priests who served at the altar (Lev. 10:9). The Nazarites were also forbidden to imbibe (Num. 6:3). Why would anyone want to be even one drink drunk?

### **Not Greedy of Filthy Lucre**

As an elder is not to be greedy of filthy lucre: neither is a deacon. There is no double standard in this matter. One story about a rich fool who went to torment should be enough to warn us (Luke 12:20). The account of the rich man who refused to help Lazarus is too archaic for greedy souls today. More modern tales are acceptable with people who flow with modern culture.

Not all greedy, ravening wolves are running around outside the sheepfold. Stingy, selfish, parsimonious, penurious, miserly, avaricious, penny-wise people can be found in the church. Deacons must not be greedy.

### **Wife: Not a Slanderer**

As it relates to a deacon and his work, one negative qualification is given which is descriptive of the deacon's wife. In this respect she is to be qualified in order that he might be qualified. The wife of the deacon must not be given to slander.

The slanderous tongue can cause more trouble than a host of peacemakers can cure. The slanderer is filled with malice, enmity, resentment, spite, venom, hostility, rancor, defamation, calumny, backbiting, and a desire to destroy another.

The beloved apostle was slandered. Some declared that Paul said, "Let us do evil, that good may come?" (Rom. 3:9). He did not say this, but the slanderer had no compunction against lying about the inspired apostle.

Solomon wrote, "He that hideth hatred *with* lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, *is* a fool" (Pro. 10:18). It is reported that an ancient king had a large table in his dining room. He had carved in the middle of the table the sentence, "He that at this table slanders men, may never at this table eat again." If that were practiced today, many would never eat at the same table twice.

### **Husband of One Wife**

The deacon must be the husband of one wife. What we have said with respect to the elder need not be repeated here except to emphasize that the home life of the deacon must be exemplary if he would do his work effectively.

### **Grave**

In order to serve effectively, a deacon must be grave. I've seen a few deacons who were standing with one foot in the grave and the other on a banana pee,<sup>1</sup> and I have wondered how they could kick up the dust, run, or hasten as a servant. To be grave does not mean to be in the cemetery.

The time is overdue for brethren of good sense and sound judgment to pound hard about the attitude we should have toward sacred and eternal matters. This is so because of the light, flippant, giddy, dull, shallow, silly, foolish, frivolous, mindless, muddle-headed, addle-brained, sappy, irrational, ill-advised, and sometimes stupid attitude which brethren display toward God in worship as well as work.

I never have thought that we needed to deposit our brains on the doorsteps before entering the church buildings, but such seems very common in so many areas. The trend of matters in the world is to move farther away from God. Brethren are being afflicted with this attitude of frivolity, fun, and gaiety as they turn their god into a sort of bosom buddy.

It is still the case that God is not like man (Psa. 50:21). Instead of trying to become like Almighty God, silly men are carving out all sorts of little gods which suit their whims. Moses was not the only son of God who lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation (Deu. 32:15).

A local television station has presented a series of nonsense about several Nashville churches changing their worship styles “into more casual affairs.” One commentator expressed this as a “change in attitude” which appeals to the unchurched. Pictures of the people and events were shown on the screen and such episodes were repulsive, sickening, disgusting, and devoid of that which tends to encourage gravity of heart and soul.

My brethren have some weird tastes. They will swallow anything—somewhat like a dog which licks his own vomit (2 Pet. 2:22). Some crazed clown can mount the podium and puke a platter of vomitus, and Nashville church people will stampede toward the platter. You dare not deny this.

Whatever happened to the people of God who are to be grave? My God is not a casual God. I have no casual attitude toward my God. Let me take off my shoes when in the presence of my God, and let me lift up holy hands toward His majestic throne. May my heart be contrite, humble, reverent, and respectful as I bow my knees before the Father (Eph. 3:14).

The casual, contemporary, giggling Nashville episodes are such as will appeal to a crew of circus clowns. Any deacon who is grave and not bereft of Bible sense will have nothing to do with all such charades.

The liberals are concocting community churches at a rapid rate, and in those dens of the devil people can do as they please. This attracts the news media and also the devil’s crowd.

Keeping the half-baked, unconverted, ignorant, self-willed, worldly-minded, card-carrying, “Church of Christ”(??) party members away from the casual church groups is as impossible as a country farm boy

keeping a pen full of hogs away from the hog trough after he fills it with garbage. Hogs are not disposed to being grave.

### **Ruling His Children Well**

The children of the deacon must be ruled well. He must not leave this duty up to the wife to rule the children; it is the responsibility of the man who has been given to be head of the family. There is scarcely anything as pathetic as a husband ruled by a hussy or a father, who like Samson, has been shorn of his locks. God will requite such people.

### **Hold the Mystery of the Faith**

Every deacon must hold “the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (2 Tim. 3:9). This is equivalent to holding to “wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3).

Jesus said to his apostles, “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11). This is also the mystery of God (Col. 2:2). It is the mystery of Christ (Col. 4:3). It is the mystery of His will (Eph. 1:9). It is the mystery of the faith (1 The. 3:9). It is the mystery of the Gospel (Eph. 6:19).

This great mystery is equivalent to the great plan of salvation which prophets of old inquired, searched diligently and who prophesied of the grace that should come. The Spirit that was in those old prophets testified beforehand of the suffering Christ and the glory that should follow.

That hidden mystery was revealed, not to the prophets of old “but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

To the Romans Paul wrote,

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:25-26).

The Gospel (the preaching of Jesus Christ, the commandment of God) is to be made known unto all nations in order that the faith

might be obeyed. The mystery had been revealed to Paul, and that was what he preached (1 Cor. 2:7). It pertained to the death of Christ and exceeded anything which eye had seen, ear heard, or that which had entered into the heart of man. Why cannot we preach such wonderful things today instead of filling the hearts of our hearers with trash?

It was the good purpose of God to make known the mystery of His will that He might gather together in one all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9). The mystery of Christ can be known if we will read the Word of God (Eph. 3:3). We can see and know what is the fellowship of the mystery expressed in the love of Christ (Eph. 3:9, 18-19). Paul requested the brethren to pray for him that “utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19).

The work of Paul among the Gentiles was to fulfill the Word of God and make known to them the mystery of the riches of the glory “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:25-27; 2:22). The apostle asked the brethren to pray for him that he might speak the mystery of Christ as he ought to speak (Col. 4:3-4).

With this short excursion, I have tried to show the tremendous importance of holding to the faith. We have been entrusted with that which others have not possessed; so it behooves us to hold fast and not waver.

### **Wife: Sober and Faithful**

There are two qualifications left which wives of deacons must possess. These are soberness and faithfulness. Obviously, a deacon would be hampered in his work if his wife was not faithful. The greatest work in all the world can be done with a blending of hearts and lives upon the part of husbands and wives. This will result in success here as well as hereafter.

## **CONCLUSION**

God set forth all of these qualifications (both positive and negative) for these offices so churches would know what to look for in their leaders. Let faithful men not wait to think about acquiring these traits when they turn forty; men who are just starting their families should be thinking about being deacons and then elders some day. The magnitude of their work is so critical to the well-being of the Lord’s church that preparation must be made well ahead of time.

# SELECTION OF ELDERS AND DEACONS

*David W. Hester*



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The way in which a congregation goes about selecting elders and deacons will, to a certain degree, determine whether those men will be effective in serving the brethren. To put it another way, the ability of the congregation to follow the leadership of the elders will be affected by how the process of selection was implemented. If the congregation has some input into the process, it will only enhance the relationship between the elders and the congregation.

It will be our intent to examine the process of selection of elders and deacons. As we begin, it must be noted that it is our conviction the Bible leaves this matter to our judgment. That is, the process of selection is a matter of expediency. Quite obviously, plain unscriptural methods cannot be accepted. For instance, the practice of selecting a Pope for the Catholic Church is one blatantly false method. However, when selecting scripturally qualified men to fill the offices of elders and deacons, God has left it to our good judgment as to the process.

When considering this subject, it is evident that the men to be considered must meet the qualifications of the New Testament before they can even be considered seriously. It has well been said, "It is better to be scripturally unorganized than to be unscripturally organized." The appointment of elders is itself not a matter of judgment,

but is enjoined upon us in the New Testament (Tit. 1:5). In commenting on this passage of Scripture, Bobby Duncan adroitly says:

Men who already possessed the characteristics Paul listed in his letter to Titus (and also in 1 Timothy) needed to be ordained or appointed to the eldership. The fact they already possessed the qualifications did not make them elders, any more than a man might be a husband merely because he has the necessary qualifications. He has to be “selected” by the woman whose husband he is to be, then he must be “installed” as her husband by the required ceremony. Regardless of how well qualified he might be, and of how much he may desire to be her husband, he cannot be her husband until she consents, and then actually becomes his wife. Just so must those qualified to be elders be selected and installed by the congregation they are to oversee. Until such selection and installation takes place, they are not elders of the church, regardless of how qualified they might be.<sup>1</sup>

To further elaborate on brother Duncan’s illustration, the “process” (ceremony) of marriage is left to our good judgment. A couple who is scripturally qualified to be married has many options as to how they will be wed. They may be married in a church building; at a courthouse by a justice of the peace; in a home; under a tree; or, in a number of other settings. Whether it be on land, on the sea, or in the air, the ceremony has been left to our judgment. Likewise, the old slave custom of “jumping the broom” was a legal and binding way of marriage.

Similarly, the process of selection of elders and deacons has been left to our good judgment. The importance of the process, however, must not be de-emphasized. Consider again what brother Duncan says in his excellent book on the eldership:

If one automatically became an elder just by possessing the qualifications, and without being selected and appointed by the congregation, look at the confusion it would cause. Some would consider themselves qualified who would not be considered qualified by the congregation. Consequently some would consider themselves elders who would not be recognized as elders by the congregation. Furthermore, it would be impossible to know who the elders of a congregation are, unless one were intimately acquainted with every member of the congregation, and personally knew of his qualifications or his lack of same.<sup>2</sup>

One can immediately see the divine wisdom of God in the reasoning behind having elders and deacons for a congregation. Likewise, God’s wisdom is manifest in enjoining upon us the selection and appointment of the same.

In a congregation that does not have elders and deacons, the decision must be made to select them as soon as possible. There are some congregations that have existed for many years without appointing men to these offices. Usually, one man (or a small group of men), is “standing in the way,” as it were, that an agenda may be continued. In such a case, those who want to impede the congregation from appointing scripturally qualified men interpret the qualifications of First Timothy and Titus to mean sinless perfection. Thus, like Diotrephes, they continue to “have the preeminence” and dominate the brethren.

However, the Bible does not specify any particular length of time required to appoint these men. Apparently, the congregations of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe selected elders and deacons within a year after those congregations were established (Acts 14:1-23). But, the church in Corinth seems to have existed for several years before men were selected and appointed. God’s intent, though, is that each congregation must grow to the point they can select and appoint qualified men to the offices of elders and deacons.

The process each congregation utilizes in implementing God’s plan varies, depending on the size of the congregation and to some degree the location. In a few congregations, the elders do the selecting and appointing without consulting the congregation at all. This is the only method we could condemn as unscriptural, based on First Peter 5:3, “Neither as being lords over *God’s* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” If a man is serving as elder without the approval of the congregation, how can he be effective in the office? Likewise, in Acts 6:1-6 the Jerusalem congregation was told to “look ye out from among you” the men to serve in the special office of ministering to the Grecian widows. It would seem that, in principle, this is the preferred way for the congregation to have input in the process.

In many congregations, the elders select men to be considered for the respective offices. They then submit the names before the congregation, and ask for any scriptural objections to be turned in to them by a certain date. If no scriptural objection has been submitted by that time, the men are then appointed to the office. This, in our judgment, is a reasonable and good method. However, there are those who would object to it. They say that the congregation still has no input in the process and further, it violates Acts 6:1-6. To these objections we say first, the elders give the congregation ample time to have a say in

the process. Elderships that are what they ought to be will seriously and prayerfully consider any scriptural objection. Further, in many cases the congregation will often volunteer its approval or disapproval of the candidates. Second, although Acts 6:1-6 is a preferred way in principle of appointment, we must be careful not to push it farther than the text states. The office to which these seven men were appointed was a special office with special qualifications. Indeed, by the time one comes to Acts 7 and 8, both Philip and Stephen (two of those chosen) were already doing evangelistic work in other locations. It would seem that the office in Acts 6 was temporary. To say, as some have, that we must follow the process of Acts 6:1-6 to the exclusion of all others in appointing elders and deacons seems to be pushing the text farther than it allows.

Implicit in this aspect of the discussion is the question of who is to take the lead in the process. Again, brother Duncan aptly summarizes our belief:

Who is to take the lead in the selection and appointment of elders? We have already observed that the congregation is to select and appoint those who will oversee it. An eldership can lead only those who will agree to follow it. But who, in the congregation, is to take the lead in the selection and appointment of those who are to be elders of the congregation? The answer is, those who take the lead in other things the congregation does. If a church already has some elders, and some additional ones are to be appointed, we would expect the present eldership to take the lead, and oversee the selection and appointment process, just as they do the other activities of the church.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it has been our observation that in too many cases, those who object to elders taking the lead in the process often object to the (scriptural) idea of elders having any authority in the spiritual affairs of the local congregation.

There have been those, usually of the Boston-Crossroads persuasion, who have advocated the unscriptural practice of having the preacher alone oversee the selection and appointment process, even if there are already elders in the congregation. Jack P. Lewis addresses this well:

The shortcomings of the system can be seen in the danger that the preachers run the congregations by the appointments they make. It can also be seen in two specific illustrations. In the one, a preacher came by and appointed some men to be elders. Later when problems developed in the congregation over leadership, no one seemed even to remember the preacher's name who

had created the situation. Without going into the details of the other demonstrations of lack of qualifications on the part of the appointees, one can say that one man of them finally left his wife, telling her that if he wanted a different woman every night, he would have her.<sup>4</sup>

Wrapped up with this faulty doctrine is that of evangelistic oversight—that is, an evangelist may exercise authority over a congregation or a plurality of congregations including the elders of such churches. However, Acts 20:28 says the Holy Ghost has made the elders overseers of ALL the flock—is the evangelist a part of the flock? First Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-21, and Titus 1:1 do not say that Paul placed Timothy and Titus in charge of the churches to put out the old elders and put in new ones.

So, we may say with all confidence, the elders of the local congregation must take the oversight in this matter as well as all other matters. Of this there can be no fear of contradiction. But, having said that, the process which is utilized (as long as it is scripturally expedient) has been left to their good judgment. Knowing the congregation plays such a vital role. If the elders are truly the shepherds of the flock as they should be, they will know the best way to go about the process. Knowing the different personalities of the members is crucial.

Also, the size of the congregation plays a part in deciding how to go about the process. In a smaller congregation, it may be easier to have the elders submit the names and give time for objections. In larger churches, it may well be that a more formal process needs to be employed, with questionnaires sent to each male member asking for their consideration of certain ones. It may be that a more lengthy screening process must be utilized. At any rate, the process itself is one which must not be decided on hastily. Those who are suggested and then appointed will have a great impact, whether positive or negative, on the local church.

To give a specific example of how one congregation goes about the process, consider the following statement which was distributed to the members of a congregation in Tusculumbia, Alabama:

For the past several weeks the elders have been giving serious and thoughtful consideration to the possibility and need of additional elders and deacons for the Valdosta congregation. We realize and understand that the work of elders and deacons is a very serious and challenging work. We have reviewed the various qualifications of elders and deacons as set forth in God's word. Therefore, after much prayerful consideration, the following names are being put before the congregation for elders and deacons....

For elder—

For deacons—

If anyone has any SCRIPTURAL objection to any of these men serving in the capacity mentioned, you are requested to write your objection, SIGN YOUR NAME, and submit to the present elders between now and November 3<sup>rd</sup>.

If there are no objections, these men will be appointed to serve in the office already named on Sunday morning, November 3, 1996 (names omitted-DH).<sup>5</sup>

By this point, the perceptive reader will have already realized something which has been implied up to this point—for the process to truly work as it should, the preacher must preach a series of lessons on the qualifications of both offices. Not only that, a class on the subject would also be helpful. For the congregation to make a distinction between scriptural objections and trivial objections, plain preaching and teaching is vital. The faithful gospel preacher will do his part.

After selection, the next step is that of appointment. Is there a specified way of appointing elders and deacons, to the exclusion of all others? The late J. W. McGarvey contended there was. In his book on the eldership, he claimed that praying and laying on of hands “constitute the Scriptural mode of induction into office.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, fasting was enjoined by brother McGarvey, since it was also mentioned in such passages as Acts 14:23. Undoubtedly, this method is biblical, but is it the only scriptural method? Do church that simply announce the appointment err in so doing?

It is our conviction that this, as the process of selection does, falls within the realm of expediency. To this we concur with brother Duncan.<sup>7</sup> Brother Everett Ferguson contends that the laying on of hands in the New Testament was actually no more than touching the person in connection with the prayer offered at his appointment, and that the touching was a symbol of the “blessing” or commendation of the entire congregation.<sup>8</sup>

The problem with binding fasting as part of the equation is the fact that the Lord Himself regulated fasting in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 6:16-18); and if one attempted to persuade the congregation to fast, it would seem to violate what the Lord taught. It is our conviction that the fasting done in Acts 14, as well as other passages, was voluntary on the part of the brethren.

The practice of many congregations to simply announce to the church that the men selected are now a part of the eldership and deacons, in our judgment, is right and good. Again, the way the elders handle it may vary from place to place given the size of the congregation, but this is within the realm of expediency. It may well be that in some churches the elders need to ask the appointees to stand and be recognized publicly. In a large congregation, this would be practical simply for identification purposes.

Some churches may wish to have a short exhortation from one of the present elders to the congregation, again emphasizing the importance of the positions and the congregation's role in supporting the men chosen. It may be that the men appointed would say a few words themselves, if they are comfortable in doing so. Again, we are dealing with the realm of expediency. Any method, as long as it does not violate Scripture, would be appropriate.

Of course, there are some things in the realm of expediency that would not be wise in certain congregations. Good judgment and a perceptive eldership will always know how to go about the process.

Indeed, the selection and appointment of elders and deacons is a process which must be thought out carefully for there to be a smooth and harmonious transition, and for the congregation to feel they have input into the affairs of the church. A strong and godly eldership will in this, as all other matters, exercise wise and prudent leadership. May God help us all as we do His will.

### Guide to the Selection of Elders

**QUALIFICATIONS**

Please consider:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**I. EXPERIENCE IN CHRISTIAN LIFE**

- Apt to teach (capable teacher) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Able to convince and exhort gainsayers? . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Does he hold to the faithful word? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Is he a novice (spiritually immature)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )

**II. DOMESTIC RELATIONS**

- Is he the husband of one wife? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Rules well his own house . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Are his children faithful (believing)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Children in subjection . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Wife grave (dignified, serious-minded) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Is she a slanderer? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Wife temperate (self-controlled) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Wife faithful in all things . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )

**III. CHARACTER**

- Good report from outsiders . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Blameless (without reproach) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Just (upright) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Sober (sensible) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Holy (pure in life) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Lover of good (men and things) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Given to hospitality . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Patient . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Temperate (self-controlled) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Is he a striker (brawler, violent)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Is he a lover of money (covetous)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Is he self-willed (head-strong, contentious)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Is he soon angry (quick tempered)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )

**IV. HABITS OF LIFE**

- Vigilant (watchful, alert) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Good behavior (dignified, orderly) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Does he drink alcoholic beverages? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )

**V. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- An example of a believer (1 Tim. 4:12) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Does he work well with others? . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Is he dependable (Rom. 12:11)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Does he show qualities of a leader for the Lord's people? . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )

To my knowledge, the man I have suggested is scripturally qualified as I have indicated.  
 (Person or persons filling out this form, please sign here): \_\_\_\_\_

### Guide to the Selection of Deacons

This form is to aid you in considering the scriptural qualifications of each person you suggest. There is no limit on the number of men you may submit for consideration. Additional sheets are available for your use. You must complete the form to the best of your knowledge about each person suggested and sign your name in the space at the bottom of the page.

Please consider:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I. EXPERIENCE IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

- First proved (possesses qualifications) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Holds mystery of faith in pure conscience (sincerely faithful to the gospel of Christ) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )

II. CHARACTER AND REPUTATION

- Grave (dignified, serious-minded) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Blameless (without reproach) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Good report (honest, good reputation) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Full of Spirit (bears fruit of Spirit) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Full of wisdom (prudent, sensible) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Is he greedy of filthy lucre (base gain)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )

III. DOMESTIC RELATIONS

- Is he the husband of one wife? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Rules his house and children . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Wife grave (dignified, serious-minded) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Is she a slanderer? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Wife temperate (self-control) . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Wife faithful in all things . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )

IV. HABITS OF LIFE

- Is he double-tongued (deceitful)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )
- Is he "given to" much wine (alcohol)? . . . . . Yes ( ) No ( )

V. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Is he an example of a believer (1 Tim. 4:12)? . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Does he work well with others? . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )
- Is he dependable (Rom. 12:11)? . . . . . Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( )

To my knowledge, the man I have suggested is scripturally qualified as I have indicated. (Person or persons filling out this form, please sign here): \_\_\_\_\_

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Bobby Duncan, *The Elders Which Are Among You* (Huntsville, AL: Publishing Designs, 1989), pp. 97-98.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Jack P. Lewis, *Leadership Questions Confronting the Church* (Nashville, TN: Christian Communications, 1985), p. 45.

<sup>5</sup>Valdosta Church of Christ, flyer distributed to congregation, October 1996.

<sup>6</sup>J. W. McGarvey, *The Eldership* (Murfreesboro, TN: Dehoff, reprinted 1962), p. 74.

<sup>7</sup>Duncan, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup>Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology For Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 314-18.

# REEVALUATION/REAFFIRMATION OF ELDERS?

*Dub McClish*



Dub McClish is a native Texan, the son of a Gospel preacher, grandson of an elder, father of a Gospel preacher, and son-in-law of a Gospel preacher. He attended Freed-Hardeman College and received a B.A. degree from Abilene Christian College. He has done local work in Idaho, Texas, Alabama, Kentucky and New Mexico. Dub is a well known author, editor, debater, publisher, and speaker who has preached the Gospel in several states, Jamaica, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. He has delivered special lectures at Southwest School of Bible Studies, Houston College of the Bible, Southern Sumatra Bible College (Indonesia), and Brown Trail Preacher Training School. He is on the advisory staff of **Firm Foundation** and has contributed numerous articles in various brotherhood publications as well as hundreds of bulletin articles and chapters in over one hundred books. He has extensive radio preaching experience.

Since 1982, he has directed the Annual Denton Lectures and has edited the Annual Denton Lectures books. On September 1, 1992, he began a new work under the oversight of the Pearl Street elders (Denton, Texas), devoting full-time to preaching in Gospel meetings, mission trips, lectureships, and in writing and publishing sound Biblical materials. He is President of Valid Publications, Inc.

Dub is married to the former Lavonne James, and they have three children: Bronwen, Hal, and Andy, and seven grandchildren.

## INTRODUCTION

The following note was in a printed worship announcement program of a local congregation of the Lord's church earlier this year:

ELDER AFFIRMATION: As part of our service this morning, our five current elders will be re-confirmed [*sic*] and Brother \_\_\_\_\_ will be re-appointed [*sic*] as an elder. This is as a result of the overwhelming response of the congregation to the recently distributed Elder Recommendation Forms.<sup>1</sup>

A brother who champions the "reaffirmation" of elders based upon periodic "reevaluation" of them began a manuscript on the subject as follows: "The reaffirmation of elders is new ground for most congregations. It is an uncharted course—a path not traveled. Few congregations have had any experience with reaffirmation."<sup>2</sup> While (as noted above) this practice is generally of recent vintage among us, it has

been observable in the denominational world for many years.<sup>3</sup> My first exposure to this practice in a church of Christ was in about 1987 when the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Forth Worth, Texas, announced in its bulletin that it follows such a process for both its elders and deacons. Due to its history of leadership in all things liberal for many years this unscriptural idea was not at all surprising. However, the next time I heard of such a practice was both surprising and disappointing. The Brown Trail congregation, Bedford, Texas, generally known through the years for its scriptural soundness, used the reevaluation/ reaffirmation process in 1990 to restructure its eldership, which included selection of one new elder.<sup>4</sup> Although there are doubtless many others, in my research for this chapter I only have documentation of the employment of this practice by the following congregations, including the two mentioned immediately above:

1. The Richland Hills congregation, North Richland Hills (Forth Worth), Texas
2. The Houston Park congregation, Selma, Alabama
3. The Pleasant Ridge congregation, Arlington, Texas
4. The Airport Freeway congregation, Euless, Texas
5. The 11th and Willis Streets congregation, Abilene, Texas<sup>5</sup>
6. The Crestview congregation, Waco, Texas<sup>6</sup>
7. The Brown Trail congregation, Bedford, Texas (the only congregation in the list without a reputation for liberalism to a greater or lesser degree.)

### DEFINITIONS

In order to understand the practice under discussion we need to understand the definition and application of the principal terms used by its advocates:

1. "Reevaluation" is based upon the word *evaluate*. To evaluate is to determine or fix worth or value of an object or person (in this case, the latter) based upon examination. To reevaluate is to evaluate again or anew. To reevaluate elders means to reexamine them in order to determine their worthiness or unworthiness to continue to be elders.

2. "Reaffirmation" is based upon the word *affirm*, which means to validate by positive assertion. Thus, to reaffirm means to validate again that which was once validated. In respect to elders, reaffirmation means that men already serving as elders have their continued service validated and positively asserted. Please note that reaffirma-

tion implies prior reevaluation; without it there is no basis for reaffirmation in this procedure.

3. “Reconfirmation” is based upon the word *confirm*. This word means to make firm, strengthen, ratify, or give approval to. Reconfirmation obviously means to repeat the giving of approval or ratification. Since this word is actually a synonym for reaffirmation, when applied to elder selection the two words may be and are often used interchangeably.

4. *Deaffirmation* and *deconfirmation* (admittedly coined words, DM) are effective antonyms for *reaffirmation* and *reconfirmation*, respectively. It logically follows that a man who is not reaffirmed/reconfirmed after reevaluation is thereby “deaffirmed”/“deconfirmed”!

### APPLICATIONS—SOME CASE STUDIES

In his sermon manuscript, John Cannon asserted the existence of two general parts to the application of the reaffirmation process:

First, each elder as an individual should reaffirm his desire to continue to serve. Self-examination requires an elder to ask, “Do I still have my heart set on serving the Lord’s church as an elder?” (1 Tim. 3:1). If the answer is “no,” he should be willing to resign or retire with dignity. If the answer is “yes,” then he should be concerned about the congregation’s attitude toward him. Second, the congregation’s attitude should be determined. The congregation can reaffirm its desire to have any or all of the present elders to continue to serve. They can reaffirm their commitment to follow the leadership of the elders as individual men and as a group or body of elders—the eldership. In the event an elder is not reaffirmed by the congregation, he is given the opportunity to retire with dignity. If reaffirmation is positive, the elders resume their leadership role in the congregation with a vote of confidence.<sup>7</sup>

His purpose is to argue the case for the concept and process. Therefore, he does not set forth the details of how either the reevaluation or reaffirmation is to be executed, although he later advocates “frequent evaluation of leaders,” “periodic evaluation,” and that elders should undergo “congregational evaluation periodically.”<sup>8</sup> While I have confirmation that the congregation where Cannon preaches (Pleasant Ridge, Arlington, Texas) uses this approach, I do not have documentation of the specifics of it.

The Richland Hills Congregation combines a specifically-structured tenure plan with its approach to reevaluation, reaffirmation, and selection process for both elders and deacons, as follows:

1. Each newly-appointed elder is appointed for only a three-year tenure before reevaluation.

2. At the end of the three-year term he can resign if he chooses to no longer serve, or he can choose to be a candidate for reaffirmation, subject to reevaluation by the congregation.

3. If his reevaluation “ballots” are sufficiently negative, he understands that he will not be reaffirmed. If they are sufficiently positive, he is reaffirmed. (I was not able to learn the formula by which one is reaffirmed or deaffirmed.)<sup>9</sup>

4. New elders are selected and appointed based upon the evaluation process and formula used for the reevaluation of existing elders.

5. Deacons are reaffirmed and new deacons selected by the same process, except the tenure of deacons is one year.

The Crestview Congregation, Waco, Texas, patterned its process after the plan of the 11<sup>th</sup> and Willis Congregation, Abilene, Texas (as mentioned above) (notwithstanding its claim to be following “a model patterned after that revealed in the book of Acts”). A summary of this plan is as follows:<sup>10</sup>

1. The congregation selected fifteen members for a “Drafting Committee” to “draft the procedures for selecting elders and present them to the congregation at an open meeting.”

2. The Drafting Committee prepared a list of “introspective” questions for prospective elders, which, when filled out by the eventually-determined candidates, were made available to the entire congregation.<sup>11</sup>

3. The chairman of the Drafting Committee conducted an “open” meeting of the congregation in order to select a seven-member “Administrative Committee.” This committee could not include any man who presently served as an elder or who might be an elder candidate.

4. The Drafting Committee tabulated the nomination ballots for members of the Administrative Committee, with the top seven vote-getters being appointed, after which the Drafting Committee dissolved.

5. The Administrative Committee, after selecting its chairman, had the responsibility to review and supervise the elder selection procedure.

6. The congregation was urged to submit written, signed nominations for elders over a given number of days, with existing elders au-

tomatically nominated unless they removed themselves from consideration (which four of the five Crestview elders did on February 12, 1987—four days after nominations began). Each candidate had to receive at least twenty nominations to be considered for appointment/reappointment.

7. The Committee then met with each candidate to determine his willingness to be appointed if selected. The list of those who were willing was then placed before the congregation.

8. A period of several days was allowed during which any member could lodge scriptural objections to any of the men. These must be in writing, signed, and delivered to the Committee by the pre-announced deadline.

9. “Ballots” (their word) were distributed and voting on the candidates took place on a given Sunday morning after worship. “Making the cut” for reaffirmation/affirmation was based on “yes,” “no,” and “I don’t know” “votes” (their term) cast for each man according to the following intricate formula:

The minimum level of confidence is a percentage of all affirmative votes cast for a nominee after his “I Don’t Know” votes have been subtracted from the total number of votes cast. The minimum level of confidence for elders shall be set at no lower than 70%. The maximum percentage of “I Don’t Know” votes shall be set at no higher than 25% of the total number of votes cast.<sup>12</sup>

10. The Committee tabulated the elder ballots on the same day the voting was done, thus determining which nominees had been “affirmed.” This being done, the ballots were destroyed.

11. The Committee then announced the results of the voting and set a date for installation/reaffirmation of the new eldership.

12. The Committee prepared a written report, in conjunction with suggestions from the congregation, evaluating the selection procedures and projecting the date for the next selection process. The Committee then dissolved and its functions ceased.

The specifics of the reevaluation/reaffirmation/selection blueprint implemented at Brown Trail, although not as intricately detailed, have many similarities to the above. The document in which they set forth their plan is reproduced in full below:

1. The elders formed a committee to regulate and monitor the process. Committee members: Gary Fallis, Dave Miller, Johnny Ramsey, Don Simpson.<sup>13</sup>

2. Formally apprise the congregation of the commencement of the evaluation/selection process (Dave Miller—April 8). Present sermons on elder qualifications and responsibilities (Johnny Ramsey—April 15 & 22).
3. Distribute evaluation/selection forms to the membership (April 22). Give membership one week to carefully/prayerfully evaluate present eldership as well as potential new elders and submit forms to the committee no later than April 29.<sup>14</sup>
4. Tabulation of forms by the committee. Present elders must receive 75% support of those submitting forms.<sup>15</sup> Individual interview appointments will be scheduled. Interviews will facilitate introspection and review biblical qualifications [*sic*].
5. Names presented to the congregation (May 13). A two week period will be given for the submission of signed scriptural objections to the committee (Deadline: May 20).
6. If any objections are forthcoming, interview appointments with objectors will be scheduled in order to ascertain the validity of objections. The objector will not be required to meet with the one to whom he objects. The objector's anonymity will be maintained. Scriptural objections will then be discussed with those receiving objections.
7. Appointment/ordination service (May 27).<sup>16</sup>

All of the plans above, while differing in some details have numerous things in common, including the following: (1) A committee (or committees) which stands between existing elders and the congregation. (2) The committee is vested with authority and oversight of the entire reevaluation/selection process. (3) The committee establishes an arbitrary (and sometimes complex) formula by which it determines who is to be reaffirmed/affirmed. (4) The congregation reevaluates existing elders and suggests prospective elders. (5) A period of time is allowed for lodging objections against any of the candidates. (6) Those who satisfy the pre-established formula and who are not disqualified because of sustainable scriptural objections lodged against them are then reaffirmed or affirmed, respectively.

Having seen the nature of the process, we turn now to consider the attempts to justify and defend it on the basis of Scriptures.

### **JUSTIFICATIONS OFFERED BY ADVOCATES**

Those congregations that have adopted a reevaluation/reaffirmation approach to elder and/or deacon appointment (such as the ones described) indicate varied attitudes toward justification of same. These range from no justification attempt to setting forth of an alleged scriptural basis.

John Cannon observes that the New Testament says little about the appointment of elders. Just as it says nothing of elder tenure, resignation, retirement, leave of absence, or sabbatical, “Likewise, the reaffirmation of elders, either individually or congregationally, is not addressed in the text.” He concludes that reaffirmation is in the realm of “congregational judgment.”<sup>17</sup>

The documents from the 11<sup>th</sup> and Willis Congregation (Abilene, TX) offer no justification for their plan, however, the “Crestview Plan” (Waco, TX) (which is based entirely upon that of the Abilene Church) attempts to do so. This is likely explained by the fact that the Abilene Congregation had been using their plan so long that they assumed that none of its members would question it. On the other hand, this was all new and novel to Crestview, and its implementors seemed to have anticipated objections to it on scriptural grounds. For whatever reason, the Crestview Administrative Committee offered the following in the opening paragraph of its “Procedure” explanation: “We are choosing to follow a model patterned after that revealed in the book of Acts in which the Church [*sic*] sought to determine its leaders.” I suppose that the passage referred to above is the same as that mentioned in a later statement made orally to the congregation by Norman Murphy, Chairman of the Administrative Committee:

The purpose of this process is simply for this congregation to recognize the shepherds/elders among us whom God has already chosen. Notice how Matthias was chosen as the apostle to replace Judas. Acts 1:24 says: “And they prayed and said, ‘Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen’” [RSV, DM]. Not even the apostles sought to impose their will on the church.<sup>18</sup>

The Brown Trail (Bedford, TX) Elder Selection Screening Committee went to much greater pains than those previously cited in its attempt to provide scriptural justification for employing its elder reevaluation process. This would be expected for at least two reasons: (1) The Brown Trail Church has had a long history of seeking to do only what the Scriptures authorize (admirably so), and the other congregations involved in this work have not exactly distinguished themselves in this pursuit. (2) Both the Brown Trail elders and the committee of its preachers and instructors surely anticipated that its adoption of this process would identify them with generally-recognized liberal congregations in the minds of many sound brethren and that they would therefore receive criticism because of this fact.<sup>19</sup> Due to the

committee's concerns about such matters it issued the following lengthy (by comparison) "Rationale" for the program they adopted:

(1) The members select elders to begin with (Acts 6:3). Since the complexion of congregational membership changes over the years, an eldership may conceivably no longer consist of the same individuals whom the present membership would select.

(2) Shepherds cannot lead where sheep will not follow. Even if a man is technically qualified to be an elder, if the membership where he attends does not perceive him as a leader whom they respect and trust, he cannot shepherd effectively.

(3) The Bible makes provision for the evaluation of an elder's spiritual standing (1 Tim. 5:19). Should a current elder be found to be disqualified, he no longer meets the qualifications to be an elder. An evaluation process is simply one expedient means of ascertaining the elder's conformity to God's will. "Once an elder, always an elder" is as false as "once saved, always saved."

(4) Elders have the authority to ascertain the amount of confidence that members have in their leadership capabilities. Any shepherd who genuinely wishes to serve the flock will naturally desire the continued approval and respect of that flock. Should an elder no longer sustain that respect from a sizable portion of the flock for whatever reason, the only proper attitude would be to remove oneself from a position that depends upon credibility. A Christian does not have to be an elder to go to heaven.<sup>20</sup>

Let us summarize the assertions offered in justification of the concept of reevaluation and reaffirmation of elders from all of the foregoing sources:

1. The New Testament authorizes the selection and appointment of elders, but does not instruct us how to do so. Therefore, we must use our judgment concerning the best way to do so.

2. The selection of Matthias as an apostle (Acts 1:24) is a model for selection of elders. God had already made His choice and the other apostles simply employed a means by which He could reveal who it was.

3. Elders are to be selected by the members (Acts 6:3).

4. Elders must have respect of the church members to be able to serve effectively.

5. Elders should be evaluated to see if they continue to be qualified (1 Tim. 5:19).

6. Elders have the authority to determine whether or not the congregation still has sufficient confidence in them to respect and follow their leadership.

## RESPONSES TO THE JUSTIFICATIONS

The initial response that needs to be made in reference to the proffered justifications is to observe the following: All of the justifications have linked (whether wittingly or unwittingly) **selection and appointment** of elders with **reevaluation and reappointment** of elders as if they were inseparable and without distinction. The basic argument of the reevaluation advocates may thus be stated as follows:

1. The Scriptures authorize local congregations to select and appoint their own elders, but the details of doing so are in the realm of expediency.

2. Reevaluation and reaffirmation are merely alternate names for and means of the selection and appointment of elders.

3. Therefore, the Scriptures authorize reevaluation and reaffirmation of elders as expedients for selection and appointment of elders.

The first premise above is true. Assuredly, the Scriptures authorize the selection and appointment of elders/bishops/pastors in every congregation in which two or more men can be found who are scripturally qualified (Acts 14:23; 15:4ff; 16:4; 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17-20; Tit. 1:5-9). Moreover, the specifics of how these are to be done are not provided either by example or precept in the New Testament. Such matters are therefore left to the exercise of human wisdom that works in harmony with the overall context of scriptural principles.

The problem arises with the second premise above: It assumes that which requires proof and evidence, which are not offered. It should be obvious to all that programs of “reevaluation” and “reaffirmation” (or “deaffirmation,” such as those described above) of previously-selected and appointed elders are not the same as mere selection and appointment procedures. The plans referenced above use separate and different forms for evaluating present elders and nominating new elders—a tacit admission that reevaluation and initial selection are separate processes even in their minds. Moreover (as noted above), the Brown Trail plan stipulates: “Present elders must receive 75% support of those submitting forms.” No such stipulation was applied to those who had not previously served. Since the second premise is false, the third premise (conclusion) is necessarily false. The reevaluation, reaffirmation, deaffirmation process concerning elders is a separate issue from the mere selection and appointment of elders and thus must be separately tested in light of the Scriptures. There is both im-

plicit and explicit authority for the latter. There is neither for the former.

What about the use of Acts 1:24 as justification, per the Crestview documents? I must admit that I have never before seen this passage used in any connection with the selection or appointment of elders, and, I think, with good reason! The setting here is the meeting of the 120 disciples, including the eleven apostles, in Jerusalem between the ascension of the Lord and the Day of Pentecost. In the process of selecting a replacement for Judas, the group prayed (apparently led by Peter, Acts 1:15): “Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show of these two the one whom thou hast chosen, to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell away” (Acts 1:24-25). It is argued that the apostles did not “impose their will on the church.” This would hardly have been possible since the church had not yet been established! But granting that this was after the church was established, it hardly helps the argument unless those making the argument are willing to cast lots and rely upon the same means by which God signals His choice of elders. The fact that this was a selection involving the miraculous element invalidates it as a precedent for any generation of the church since the cessation of miracles. True, this incident shows that the apostles did not independently or arbitrarily make the choice of Matthias, but this has little to do with the question before us. The “church” did not make the final selection, either. God did! The argument seems to be that, because the apostles did not choose Matthias, we therefore have scriptural authority for reevaluating and reaffirming or “deaffirming” elders. This is a very large stretch—even for a Texas church!

I turn my attention now to the “Biblical Rationale” statement (hereafter referred to as the “Rationale”) issued by Brown Trail (see above). Due to the fact that it is by far the longest attempt at a biblical justification it will require a longer response than the other attempts. While realizing that the Bible need teach a thing only once for it to be the will of God, it is still noteworthy that the four paragraphs of the “Rationale” are not all that “biblical.” That is, only two passages are cited (not even quoted), and little application of them is made. Had there been more Scripture in their favor they surely would have used it! I intend to demonstrate that neither of these passages justifies what these brethren purport to see in them.

The first passage cited is Acts 6:3. What, if anything, does it have to say about the issue before us? The only point the “Rationale” drew from it was that “The members select elders to begin with (Acts 6:3).” The context of this passage is the response of the apostles to the complaint from the Grecian Jews that “their widows were being neglected in the daily ministrations” (Acts 6:1). The apostles called the church together and told them, “Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3). While admitting in his sermon cited earlier that the seven men selected were not elders (in his opinion they were deacons),<sup>21</sup> Dave Miller concludes: “Let’s simply note that here is an inspired selection process given by the inspired apostles.” I have no problem with this conclusion. In fact, I believe it a correct use of the passage and have so used it for many years. However, I ask how this justifies the reevaluation, reaffirmation, deaffirmation program? All this passage does is furnish the principle that the whole congregation is to be involved in the selection of elders (and deacons), not in some intricate reevaluation process of men who were already selected, appointed, and serving.

Next, the “Rationale” states: “Since the complexion of congregational membership changes over the years, an eldership may conceivably no longer consist of the same individuals whom the present membership would select.” My initial reaction to this statement was registered immediately after the Brown Trail program was implemented, and it remains the same:

Just because the “complexion” of a congregation changes over the years (as all do) says nothing to justify the practice (i.e., of reevaluation/reaffirmation). When saints come to place membership with a congregation they are under the same directive to submit themselves to the elders of that congregation, just as every other member is (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). If said members cannot follow the leadership and work under the oversight of those elders, why should they want to place membership?...

I see certain harmful consequences that may accrue from this practice: (1) The congregation is “up for grabs” with the change of congregational “complexion.” Any group of errorists of any sort (antis, premillennialists, Crossroaders, Kingites, whatever) could move into a congregation over a period of months and so change the “complexion” of a church as to demand their own chosen elders. Of course, this has been done as a power move in more than one place, but the “reevaluation” program invites and encourages same. (2) This “reevaluation/reconfirmation/deconfirmation” concept removes the oversight of the congregation from the elders (Acts 20:28) and

gives it to 25% of the congregation! Majority rule in the absence of elders has its drawbacks at times, but allowing a mere 25% to determine who will or will not serve as elders, and that, perhaps on the basis of personal likes and/or dislikes rather than on Scriptural qualifications, is absurd. Moreover, the 25% apparently relates to the number of forms received by the...screening committee, rather than 25% of the actual membership (“75% support of **those submitting forms**,” “Procedure...” statement [emp. DM]). Depending on how many forms were submitted, the 25% could represent a much smaller percentage of the entire membership. Talk about “minority rule”!<sup>22</sup>

A similar response was made by Garland Elkins to the “change of complexion” idea:

Those who contend for “reconfirmation” argue that many of the present members were not there when the present elders were appointed, and if they were given the opportunity at present they would not be in favor of appointing the present elders. That may be true, but remember that they agreed to work under the oversight of the present elders when they placed their membership with a given congregation.<sup>23</sup>

W. Terry Varner reacted to the “change of complexion” statement as follows:

[The] argument for “Reconfirmation” based on “the complexion of a congregation in terms of its membership can change over a period of time...no longer consist of the same individuals...” proves nothing. Hopefully, the case would be that...the congregation would grow by winning souls and transfer of memberships, so that membership would indeed change. If the eldership continues to meet the divine qualifications, whether the complexion of the congregation changes or not, he remains God’s servant as an elder... For a congregation’s complexion to change wherein the members would not submit themselves places the members in violation of Heb. 13:17, “obey them that have rule over you” [*sic*].<sup>24</sup>

There is not even any reasonable, much less scriptural, connection between the “change of complexion” of a congregation and the justification for some sort of reevaluation/reaffirmation process for elders.

The next item in the “Rationale” asserts: “Shepherds cannot lead where sheep will not follow.” It goes on to argue that while a man may be “technically qualified” to be an elder, if the congregation does not respect and trust him as a leader, he cannot “shepherd effectively.” Does not this open the flood gates to abuse of and rebellion against the eldership or at least of certain men who are elders? Does not this place all of the responsibility upon the elders to be men (even though scripturally qualified) who the members want to follow (based on carnal standards), rather than placing it on the members to obey the

elders because they are qualified and because God commands them to (Heb. 13:17, et al.)?

Mac Deaver wrote the following perceptive observations in response to the attempted justification of “reevaluation” of elders on the basis that the members will not follow him even though he is scripturally qualified:

Brother Miller did not exactly prove what he set out to prove regarding the alleged scripturalness of evaluating elders who are already elders in order to determine whether or not the sheep are going to follow them.

I think the matter of stressing that elders can’t lead if the sheep won’t follow needs to be thought about more thoroughly. The evaluation process, as far as I can see from the material you sent, is to determine whether or not the congregation is willing to submit to certain men. It is not simply an effort to find out who is or is not scripturally qualified to remain an elder.

I think the position that brother Miller takes implies that at any time there is an effort on the part of the elders to lead in a direction in which the sheep don’t want to go, then all they have to do at that time is to reevaluate the eldership and remove all those to whom they do not want to submit. **This would imply that the elders are not ruling the congregation but that really the congregation is ruling the eldership** [emp. DM]...<sup>25</sup>

The argument that a man could meet the qualifications, yet not be perceived by the members as a shepherd or one to whom they would submit themselves “is filled with questions and problems,” according to W. Terry Varner:

1. If an elder met the divine qualifications, he would, by virtue of his qualification, “know” the flock he helps to oversee (1 The. 5:12-13) and be a watchman of (Acts 20:28-31; Heb. 13:17).
2. The subsequent result would be that the eldership would be known (come to be known by all newcomers in the membership). There is no justification for “Reconfirmation of the Eldership.”<sup>26</sup>

This pretense of an argument in fact adds a qualification to those in the Scriptures, namely, that “the bishop therefore must measure up to certain ‘leadership qualities’ as determined by at least 75% of the membership.”

The second passage of Scripture cited in the “Rationale” (1 Tim. 5:19) is supposed to demonstrate that “the Bible makes provision for the evaluation of an elder’s spiritual standing.” In this passage Paul teaches: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, except at *the mouth of* two or three witnesses.” He then adds, “Them that sin reprove in the sight of all, that the rest also may be in fear” (1 Tim.

5:20). The “Rationale” goes on to state the redundancy that “should a current elder be found to be disqualified, he no longer meets the qualifications to be an elder.” It is then alleged that “an evaluation process is simply one expedient means of ascertaining the elder’s conformity to God’s will.” The paragraph closes by stating: “‘Once an elder, always an elder’ is as false as ‘once saved, always saved.’”

My immediate response to this use of First Timothy 5:19 when I first read the “Rationale” was that it was a misuse of it, and my convictions have not changed. I wrote the following concerning this part of the “Rationale”:

I find no Scriptural precedent for it [i.e., the “reevaluation/reconfirmation” practice] in 1 Timothy 5:19-20. To find this practice in this text requires some imaginative eisegesis, rather than sound exegesis. Of course, “once an elder, always an elder” is faulty. However, the task and necessity of removing an elder because two or three witnesses sustain a charge of sin against him is one thing, and “reevaluating” and either “reconfirming” or “deconfirming” an entire eldership as a matter of policy or routine is something altogether different. Further, I know of no basis for removing a man as an elder unless he is proved to be unqualified on the basis of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. To say that a man should be removed because “25% of the congregation doesn’t want to follow him” or “doesn’t like him” [is not in this passage or any other].

Brown Trail has not announced that it will do this annually or at any other stated interval, but the precedent has now been set for doing it. “If it was a good thing to do once, why not a good thing to do regularly?” it might be argued.<sup>27</sup>

The late Bill Jackson wrote some incisive comments relating to the “reevaluation” practice and removing a man from the eldership as set forth in this part of the “Rationale”:

The work of the eldership is permanent—the congregation will always need elders. The men appointed were appointed because they met the qualifications set forth in the Bible. I think all of us would agree that an elder can resign, and certainly, if unqualified, should be removed if he does not resign. But that is the point: An elder is “examined, evaluated” day-by-day in his life and in his functioning. Fellow-elders and the congregation should be able to see the man, know the man, day-by-day in the work of the kingdom. It becomes nothing but a political arrangement, giving every man a vote, however wrongly motivated he may be, and through this process, good and qualified men can be rejected on this second evaluation, and thus unscriptural and liberal forces can move their own men into office!<sup>28</sup>

Once more, from the pen of W. Terry Varner came the following words:

Elders must meet the divine qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:3-9, 1 Peter 5:1-3, and other related Scriptures. This is not to affirm “once an elder, always an elder,” as brother Miller seems to accuse those of us of who would oppose the “Reconfirmation of Elders.”

Since an elder must meet the divine qualifications in order to be appointed an elder, it follows by implication, that an elder becomes disqualified when he fails to meet and/or violates the divine qualifications. To imply any other manner of removing an elder or eldership is to assume more than the Bible teaches. There is no hint of “Reconfirmation of Elders” in the divine qualifications.<sup>29</sup>

The “reevaluation” process is merely an expedient means of determining whether or not an elder is conforming to God’s will, the “Rationale” asserts. John Cannon made the same basic assertion in his attempt to justify the reevaluation procedure to the Pleasant Ridge Congregation (Arlington, TX):

The reaffirmation of elders, either individually or collectively is not addressed in the text.... If congregational judgment or opinion is valid for current practices of dealing with “elder questions,” then reaffirmation would be in the same realm of congregational judgment.<sup>30</sup>

The attempt to place the reevaluation/reaffirmation phenomenon in the realm of expediency overlooks an elementary principle of biblical hermeneutics: Authorization must precede expediency. In other words, no matter can be expedient unless it is first authorized, and the authorization for this practice has not been produced.

The final paragraph of the “Rationale” asserts that elders have the authority to determine what level of confidence the members have in their “leadership capabilities.” Granting that they have this authority, where is there any emphasis in the New Testament relating to a craving for such information? This sort of uneasiness smacks more of the cold, sterile, secular concerns of executives in the business world than it does of God’s elders. It is evident throughout the “Rationale” that there is a severe preoccupation with whether or not an elder is perceived as having “leadership” qualities that will inspire members to follow him. There seems to be a corresponding under emphasis on the actual Scriptural qualifications themselves in the whole reevaluation/reaffirming process. Elders have authority in the local congregation in matters of expediency and judgment, but they do not have authority to empower a committee, whatever its purpose, that supersedes the authority God gave them alone!

## A LIST OF CONCERNS

I will now list a number of matters that need to be seriously considered by any congregation that is contemplating adoption of a reevaluation/reaffirmation plan. This plan concerns me because:

1. It professes to “reappoint” (the practical meaning of reaffirming or reconfirming) men who are already appointed and who have not resigned (both contradictory and nonsensical).

2. It renders duly-selected and appointed elders only “de facto” or “quasi” elders during the reevaluation process.

3. It places an administrative or screening committee in authority to which the elders must give account and submit.

4. It prevents elders (who are to oversee all of the members and all of the work of all of the congregation) from having any voice in or oversight of who will serve as elders.

5. It sets a precedent that will be very difficult to abandon. It will thenceforth appear unfair to those to whom it was originally applied if all succeeding elders are not likewise subjected to it.

6. It adds the qualification of “leadership characteristics” to the qualifications found in the New Testament.

7. It may result in removing certain unqualified men from the eldership, but it also provides an opportunity for forces of error to quickly and easily gain control of the eldership of a congregation with a minimum number of people by removal of qualified men. What if the elders in a congregation are qualified men who are determined to keep the church pure, but in the reevaluation process a twenty-six percent element of liberals in the church turn in negative ballots? Just this easily (and unscripturally) can a dedicated, qualified eldership be restructured!

8. It creates a great potential for dissension and division in a congregation should the elders dare contradict the committee the existence of which they have authorized and whose policies and procedures have been sanctioned by the congregation.

9. It gives an opportunity for fraud, deceit, and favoritism in the process of tabulation of the ballots by the committee members.

10. It could encourage an elder who is being reevaluated to engage in politicking and “promise-making” in order to be able to attain the necessary percentage of votes for reaffirmation.

11. It establishes arbitrary percentages for “reaffirmation” or “deaffirmation.”

12. It necessarily tabulates the percentages only of those who actually participate in the balloting, which may represent much smaller percentages of the actual membership.

13. It allows a small percentage of the members of a congregation to determine who will be its elders and how long they will serve.

14. It smacks more of the standards of failure and success employed by business rather than the standards set forth in the New Testament.

15. It replaces the scriptural mandate, “them that sin rebuke before all” (1 Tim. 5:20) with “in the event an elder is not reaffirmed by the congregation, he should be given opportunity to retire with dignity.”<sup>31</sup>

16. It supplants the scriptural instruction for dealing with sin and/or failure in qualifications of elders (1 Tim. 5:19) with a humanly-contrived scheme of detailed and intricate “reevaluation” relating more to “leadership characteristics” than with Scriptural qualifications.

## CONCLUSION

The one major concern that overrides all others for lovers of Truth is that the formal, arbitrary, highly-structured reevaluation, reaffirmation, or deaffirmation procedure that is almost a fad running through liberal congregations (and that has ensnared even some unwary conservative ones) is **without scriptural authority!** Most of those who defend it hardly make an appeal to the Scriptures. Those who attempt such an appeal fail.

Philip Gould, a deacon at the Brown Trail Congregation at the time the “reevaluation” and “reconfirming” plans were being implemented, expressed his grave concern about this and several other matters in a letter to the elders. The words below are germane to the point at hand:

Regarding the office of an elder, brother Peterman [one of the elders at that time, DM] mentioned something called “reconfirming” the existing elders through a majority or some percentage of votes of the congregation. I assume that this is similar to the bishops’ way of electing a new pope, **because there is no basis for it in God’s Bible** [emp. DM]. The eldership is not a popularity contest. You are either qualified or you are not—you know the Truth. It was interesting to see where the Airport Freeway Congregation [Euless, TX], now home to many past Brown Trail members, “reconfirmed” their elders a few weeks ago as they installed others. Is the Brown Trail Church going to import doctrinal error from those who previously left when God’s will and not theirs prevailed?<sup>32</sup>

Many other astute Bible students have recognized this dearth of authorization and have boldly stated so:

Robert R Taylor, Jr.:

Like you, I do not believe there is Biblical authorization for what they [the Brown Trail Elder Selection Screening Committee] proposed. I constantly stand amazed at our brethren seeking to tamper with God's crystal clear pattern. The eldership is clear in Holy Writ. They are seeking to muddy the clear water of such. I view such with great alarm.<sup>33</sup>

Bill Jackson:

There is absolutely no Bible, or justification, for that matter, of "reconfirming, reexamination, or reevaluation" as to either elders or deacons. It smacks of political maneuvering done in foreign countries whereby a new government is formed, based on "reevaluation" and a "vote of confidence." It reflects adversely on a congregation, and those behind this process, to move in this direction.<sup>34</sup>

W. Terry Varner:

The process of "Reconfirmation of Elders" is without Scriptural basis and results in a way to remove Scriptural men as elders and to place men into the office of the eldership that harmonize more nearly with the thoughts and desires of the membership rather than the divine qualifications.<sup>35</sup>

Garland Elkins:

I do not know of any Bible authority for "electing" elders as if it were a political process. Neither do I know of any Bible authority for "reconfirming" existing elders. If elders lose their qualifications, they should resign. If qualified elders resign, the congregation has the same right to appoint them again in the future (if they are qualified) as they did the first time they were appointed.... I do not know why brethren cannot be content to simply "appoint" (ASV), "ordain" (KJV) (Acts 14:23) rather than to come up with an imaginary "reconfirmation" of present elders.<sup>36</sup>

Mac Deaver:

I find no authority for such a procedure in the New Testament.<sup>37</sup>

I concluded my written reaction to this practice at the time it was being carried out with the following assessment:

The best argument against it is the same as that against the instrument and a thousand other innovations that men have dreamed up: "There ain't no Bible fer it," as the hillbilly saint declared!<sup>38</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>*The Sunday Morning Review*, Houston Park Church of Christ, Selma, Alabama (Jan. 19, 1997). My thanks to Michael Hatcher for this document.

<sup>2</sup>John H. Cannon, Jr., “A New Direction for Church Leadership: The Reaffirmation and Selection of Elders Among Churches of Christ,” manuscript of sermon delivered at Pleasant Ridge Church of Christ, Arlington, TX (n.d., but 1991 or later), p. 1. Cannon excerpted and edited this manuscript from his unpublished Doctor of Ministry dissertation by the same title, for the College of Biblical Studies, Abilene Christian University. (The quotation endnoted is one of the very few things in the entire manuscript with which I can agree, incidentally!) My thanks to Jesse Whitlock for this document.

<sup>3</sup>Garland Elkins tells of first seeing such procedures in the Christian Church perhaps thirty years ago (from a personal letter to Goebel Music, May 14, 1990 [used by permission and with appreciation]). As with most of the other innovations the change agents are continually introducing into the worship, organization, and work of the New Testament church, this one apparently originated in sectarian/denominational circles where the issue of scriptural authority is rarely considered. My thanks to Goebel Music for several letters and documents relating to this subject.

<sup>4</sup>I have known and loved many of the brethren at Brown Trail, including her preachers and some of her elders, for many years. I have also worked closely with this congregation in many ways for a number of years. Therefore, while it particularly grieves me to report this information concerning her, fairness and consistency demand it. I am not opposed to Brown Trail as such, but only to the error in which I believe she was involved in this matter.

<sup>5</sup>Three of its six elders (in 1989, the date of documents in my possession) were firmly ensconced at Abilene Christian University (Ian Fair, Dean of the College of Biblical Studies; Neil Lightfoot, Professor of Bible; Dub Orr, board member). My thanks to Darrell and Ruth Hanson for extensive documents pertaining to the 11<sup>th</sup> and Willis plan.

<sup>6</sup>This concept was adopted in 1986-1987, after instruction sessions at Crestview by Ian Fair and Dub Orr. The Crestview documents and forms are almost “carbon copies” of the ones produced by 11<sup>th</sup> and Willis. (I infer from a cover letter accompanying the documents from 11<sup>th</sup> and Willis that brethren Fair and Orr have introduced their procedure in other congregations where they have lectured on the eldership.) My thanks to Darrell and Ruth Hanson for numerous documents relating to the Crestview procedures.

<sup>7</sup>Cannon, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>Cannon, pp. 6-7.

<sup>9</sup>Interestingly, the Richland Hills “Affirmation-Reaffirmation” ballots for 1992 contained only a “yes” or “no” box to check for each candidate. The 1996 ballots contained a third box to check: “Don’t know this elder.” Since the “I don’t know” response is a prominent part of the formula coming out of 11<sup>th</sup> and Willis (Abilene, TX) and adopted by Crestview (Waco, TX), this addition by Richland Hills may reflect influence from one or both of these congregations.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted from “Suggested Procedures for Participative Appointment of Elders,” Crestview Church of Christ, Waco, TX, (1987), p. 1. The plans of these two churches are so similar that there is no need to summarize both of them.

<sup>11</sup>“Introspective Questionnaire for Elder Candidates,” Crestview Church of Christ (1986, Revised 12/17/86). In explaining the rationale for the questions, I find it significant that the Committee stated the following: “These carefully chosen and sometimes delicate questions are intended to let the congregation know the heart and

mind of prospective elders. Per the guidance of brethren Fair and Orr, there are no questions about specific doctrinal matters such as the Holy Spirit, divorce and remarriage, etc.” How’s that for a telling bit of liberal advice from the ACU bigwigs and an equally-telling mark of liberalism in the Crestview folk that they readily swallowed it?

<sup>12</sup>“Suggested Procedures...” p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>In his sermon at Brown Trail (4/8/90), Dave Miller also added the following information concerning the committee membership and function: “Maxie Boren has an opportunity to have input on this committee, but is out of touch and out of town so much that his participation will probably be rather minimal” (from transcription of taped sermon).

<sup>14</sup>Originally, members were not required to sign these forms, per Miller’s sermon: “You won’t be asked to sign that form. In fact, our five current elders have made that point, that this is strictly your opportunity without any pressure from anywhere or anyone to state your feelings about the current eldership in light of what the Bible teaches.” By the time the forms were distributed on April 22, this part of the procedure had been changed per a document entitled, “Announcement from the Elder Selection Screening Committee”: “Only one change has been made in the procedures which were presented two weeks ago to the congregation. The committee is asking that you sign all forms. No forms will be considered which do not include a signature.... The only purpose for requiring signatures is to insure that all participants are members of this congregation and to ‘provide things honest in the sight of all men.’”

<sup>15</sup>In his sermon, Miller referred to the need for one in a leadership position to voluntarily resign if he “no longer sustains the respect from a sizable portion of the flock” and “present elders would need to receive a sizable percentage of support from this congregation.” He immediately used objections by 25% of the congregation as a percentage that should cause one to voluntarily resign.

<sup>16</sup>“Procedure for Implementing Elder Evaluation/Selection Process, Brown Trail Church of Christ.” From the following statements at the beginning of brother Miller’s sermon, this “procedure” was apparently suggested by him: “Plans were made several weeks ago more concretely and they [the elders] asked me to present them with some information that would assist them in carrying out this objective.” The “Procedure” statement seems to have been worded by the “elder selection screening committee” as a whole: “And so, in formulating this committee, as well as a number of guidelines that were discussed by the committee, we submitted to the eldership for their approval [*sic*]. A system has been set in place by which current elders might be evaluated and additional elders might be added to the body of elders.”

<sup>17</sup>Cannon, “A New Direction....”

<sup>18</sup>Norman Murphy, “Text of Statement to Congregation from the Administrative Committee” (Feb. 1, 1987).

<sup>19</sup>Dave Miller was defensive about this very charge in his sermon of April 8, 1990: “But what about this idea of reevaluating current elders or reconfirming? There are some brethren that are really up in arms it seems to me and say, ‘That is what the liberals are doing.’ ... We may use the term ‘evaluation’ of elders, we may use the term ‘reconfirmation.’ If those terms concern you, then call it something else.”

<sup>20</sup>“Biblical Rationale for Evaluation of Elders” (n.d.). Ironically, according to a former Brown Trail elder, a “reevaluation/ reaffirmation” proposal was suggested by one of the other elders in about 1985, but it was rejected on grounds that there was no scriptural authority for such a procedure!

<sup>21</sup>I differ with the assertion that the seven men of Acts 6 were deacons: (1) These men (by Miller’s admission) were appointed before the church had any elders. It is not reasonable (not to say not scriptural) to envision a congregation (then or now) with deacons before it has elders or without elders. (2) If these seven men were deacons in the sense of Philippians 1:1 we have two sets of qualifications for their selection, one in Acts 6:3 and another in 1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13. Why so and which should we now use? (3) The use of a form of the Greek word *diakonos* in reference to the “Jerusalem seven” no more implies an “official” position than when used in reference to civil rulers (Rom. 13:4, 6) or to Phoebe (Rom. 16:1). However, as Miller notes, whether or not they were deacons does not negate the fact of the selection process set forth in Acts 6:3.

<sup>22</sup>Dub McClish, personal letter addressed to Goebel Music (May 23, 1990). I would add to this that if one is a member of a congregation in which elders begin to deviate from the Truth, whether into some form of liberalism or anti-ism, if they cannot be persuaded either to return to the Truth or to resign, then one should leave that congregation and seek one that is committed to the Truth.

<sup>23</sup>Garland Elkins, personal letter addressed to Goebel Music (May 14, 1990), used by permission.

<sup>24</sup>W. Terry Varner, personal letter addressed to Goebel Music (n.d., but received May 29, 1990), used by permission.

<sup>25</sup>Mac Deaver, personal letter addressed to Goebel Music (May 10, 1990), used by permission.

<sup>26</sup>Varner, letter.

<sup>27</sup>McClish, letter.

<sup>28</sup>Bill Jackson, personal letter addressed to Goebel Music (May 4, 1990), used by permission.

<sup>29</sup>Varner, letter.

<sup>30</sup>Cannon, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup>Cannon, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup>Philip C. Gould, 8-page letter to the Brown Trail elders (March 24, 1990), p. 5. Note: Brother Gould and his family are no longer members at Brown Trail.

<sup>33</sup>Robert R. Taylor, Jr., personal letter addressed to Goebel Music (June 20, 1990), p. 2, used by permission.

<sup>34</sup>Jackson, letter.

<sup>35</sup>Varner, letter.

<sup>36</sup>Elkins, letter.

<sup>37</sup>Deaver, letter.

<sup>38</sup>McClish, letter.

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# ELDERS' DUTY TO MEMBERS

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## INTRODUCTION

In the marvelous and infinite wisdom of God the church of our Lord existed before time and all other created things (Eph. 3:9-11). In detail this means that her terms of entrance, conduct of her members, her organization, work, worship, and destiny, with all the minute details involved therein, existed in God's mind before the world was. Hence, **the eldership**, as set out on the pages of the New Testament, was and is a part of "the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). Furthermore, this means that the duty of elders to the members of the church is revealed in the New Testament as a fundamental part of the gospel of Christ.

## THERE SHOULD BE NO SUPPORT FOR UNFAITHFUL ELDERSHIPS

In the beginning of this study let it be clearly understood that we do not uphold nor support unqualified, derelict, and rebellious elders. If they are **not qualified** or, being qualified, **refuse** to do the work God has assigned them (which means they would cease to be qualified), and if they have refused all scriptural efforts to bring them to repentance, they are just as lost and worthy of corrective discipline as any

fornicator. They should be exposed, marked, and avoided just as any immoral, lazy, cowardly, ignorant, false doctrine-teaching preacher, deacon, or member.

Elders are leaders. If they are ungodly, they will lead the church into ungodliness. Hence, the tremendous seriousness of this study of the elders' duty to the members of the church of Christ.

### **ELDERS ARE OBLIGATED TO THEMSELVES, GOD, AND THE CHURCH TO BE QUALIFIED FOR THEIR WORK**

This will not be a detailed study of the qualifications of elders that all men must meet in order for God to recognize and accept them as elders: that is not the purpose of this chapter. However, just as persons are not qualified to be scripturally baptized unless they have first believed, repented, and confessed their faith in Christ, men are not made elders by the Holy Spirit unless they satisfy God in meeting the requirements revealed by Him in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 (Acts 20:28). Therefore, whether a congregation is appointing elders for the first time or selecting men to serve in an existing eldership, if they desire to be well pleasing to God, they have no choice but to appoint men who meet the qualifications of the preceding passages.

### **ELDERS MUST UNDERSTAND HOW TO ASCERTAIN BIBLE AUTHORITY**

If elders in general had the proper respect for the authority of the Bible, they would be willing to engage in the study that is necessary to learn **how** the Bible authorizes. Actually, this should be something in which a man is thoroughly familiar before he becomes an elder. This is directly involved in what Paul told Timothy and thereby all of us to do in Second Timothy 2:15. Thus, Paul declared to the Ephesian elders, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). To commend elders (or anyone) to the Word of God, is to commend them to God's authorized code of conduct (John 12:48; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jam. 1:25). To commend elders to God's authority for man is useless if they do not know how to ascertain that authority. Let us study what elders must understand about Bible authority and the relationship it sustains to fellowship and unity in the church if they are to be God's men.

## OBLIGATORY AND OPTIONAL MATTERS

Regarding our relationship with God and one another, there are two areas of possible misunderstanding and disagreement regarding Bible authority: those matters of doctrine that are **obligatory** and those that are **optional**.

Matters of obligation pertain to those things God has authorized in His Word that we **must** do or not do in order for Him to save us from our sins and for us to remain in a saved state with Him. Fellowship or unity exists between God and man **only** when man is obedient to the obligatory matters of God's will (Heb. 5:9). To disagree on these matters prevents fellowship and unity with God and with all those who are in fellowship with God (Mat. 7:21; Luke 6:46; John 14:6; Col. 3:17; 1 Cor. 1:10; Heb. 5:8-9; Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 2:11).

**Obligatory** matters, therefore, bear directly on man's fellowship with God and man. Man does not determine what is and what is not a matter of fellowship in things obligatory. If a thing is an obligatory matter, by its very nature, it is a matter of fellowship with God. Hence, obligatory matters bear directly on one's fellowship or the lack of it with all those who do or do not discharge their obligations to God by complying with said obligations found only in His written Word, the Bible (2 John 9-12).

Since things optional in doctrine flow directly from obligatory matters, we must first have a correct understanding of **how** one determines what is obligatory in the revelation of God's infallible Word and what is not. Therefore, at this point we shall study how the Bible authorizes. If elders (preachers also) are ignorant of these principles of Bible study for whatever the reason, they are subject to stumbling, falling, and, thereby, bringing the church down with them in their fall.

### DO ELDERS KNOW HOW THE BIBLE AUTHORIZES?

In order for elders to determine what is obligatory they must learn the manner or means whereby any language authorizes (obligates) any one to do any thing. "**Direct statement**," "**example**," and "**implication**" are the terms that identify three of the communicative elements of language. These terms are not merely human inventions. Before anyone labeled a certain part of speech a verb, it was doing what a verb does. A certain word was labeled a verb for purposes of identification and definition regarding the part it plays in language communi-

cation. The same is true concerning “direct statements,” “examples,” and “implication.”

### “Direct Statement”

Direct statements exist in the Greek language of the New Testament. The reason is that the Holy Spirit wrote the New Testament autographs in the common Greek of the first century. The Bible in any other language is a translation. In rendering the Greek of the New Testament into any other language, the translator must have the command of the Greek as well as the language into which it is being rendered. Hence, the translator must know the different kinds of direct statements existing in the Greek New Testament as well as the kinds of direct statements of the language into which the Greek is being translated.

Suffice it to say at this point in our study that there are **eleven different kinds** of direct statements in the New Testament Greek. Examples of these are found in Mark 16:16, Romans 6:1, Hebrews 6:1, Colossians 3:1, Acts 16:31, Acts 2:38, and Romans 6:2. I have not labeled these passages according to the particular “mood” (the relationship of the action of the verb indicated in the realm of reality) of the Greek grammar. It is beyond the scope of this study to get into a study of Greek grammar. Suffice it to say that I am simply showing that the term “direct statement” identifies and defines statements in the New Testament Greek. By the very nature of these statements, men are directed or authorized (**obligated to God**) to conduct themselves in certain ways.

### “Example”

Many activities of the first century church are recorded in the New Testament. These constitute inspired accounts of the actions of the Lord’s church at that time. **How does anyone know which of these inspired accounts of actions done by the first century church are examples (patterns)?** Moreover, having determined that an account of an action of the first century church is an example, how does one determine whether the example **must** be followed or whether it **may** be followed?

**When does the Bible account of an action constitute an example that must be followed?** *An account of an action constitutes an example (pattern) that we **must** follow when we find the church with gen-*

*eral apostolic approval and teaching (authority) practicing whatever it may be that is right within itself and essential to Christianity*

Regarding **when** to partake of the Lord's Supper, we are directed by God in the totality of the truth found in Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; 16:1-2. Hence, the church meeting on the first day of the week in Troas constitutes an example (pattern) that **must** be followed regarding when to partake of the Lord's Supper. The reason, therefore, that it is sin to partake of the Lord's Supper on any day other than the first day of the week is that there is no example, direct statement, or implication authorizing the church to do so. *How many faithful elders can explain why the Acts 20:7 account of this specific action of the church at Troas, apart from other accounts of actions of the Troas church, constitutes an example and thereby authority for us regarding when to partake of the Lord's Supper?*

### **“Implication”**

Can anyone find in the New Testament where it is **explicitly stated** (in just so many words) that the church owned or rented land and buildings such as are rented and owned today by most churches of Christ in the U.S.A.? There is an “assembling of ourselves together” that Christians are not to forsake (Heb. 10:25). Also, the church at Troas “came together to break bread” on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Furthermore, the church at Corinth came “together into one place” (1 Cor. 11:20, 33; 14:23). How could these brethren assemble without a **place** to assemble? Hence, when the church is authorized to assemble, a place is **implied** by the totality of the Scriptures bearing on this subject, and thereby constituting the general authorization of the New Testament for the church to assemble.

Furthermore, I know that Saul of Tarsus repented of his sins in the process of becoming a Christian. The question is, how do I know it? I do not know that he repented because the Bible says so in just so many words (explicitly). I do know it because logically I can deduce (infer) from the explicit information available that Saul of Tarsus repented of his sins in the process of becoming a Christian.

Here is how the deductive process is done. I know (explicitly) that the Bible teaches it is necessary for one to repent in the process of becoming a Christian (Acts 17:30; 2:38). I know that Saul became a Christian (Acts 22:16). Therefore, I know that in the process of be-

coming a Christian, Saul repented of his sins. Thus, I have inferred correctly what the Bible implies by reasoning correctly from the explicit material having a bearing on the subject.

This same type of reasoning is done by elders, preachers, and church members on a daily basis in secular matters, but in the greatest matter of all, one's spiritual well-being, men conduct themselves like one farmer-brother in Oklahoma said of an elder in a liberal church. Of that certain elder's religious thinking and decision making he said, "He gets around like a goose hit in the back of the head with a wet corn cob." In other words, the liberal elder was irrational when it came to determining what the Bible authorizes as well as what would and would not be done optionally in the work of the church. In view of the sad state of the church today, evidently there are a great many "goosie" elders comprising that irrational gaggle.

### **The Only Way the Bible Teaches**

From the preceding study we should have learned that whatever the Bible teaches it teaches either explicitly or implicitly. Furthermore, what the Bible teaches implicitly is just as binding as what it teaches explicitly. There are those in the church as well as out of it who teach otherwise. Do elders know how to correctly deal with them?

### **The Bible Authorizes by What Is Expedient**

Let us now more specifically study optional matters. **Options** exist where there is scriptural authorization (obligation established) to act. The fact that there are options implies more than one choice. Such choices arise when there are biblically authorized matters wherein God has **not** stipulated the who, where, when, and/or how to do what He has authorized. Therefore, God has left it to man's wisdom to decide which option is most **advantageous (expedient)** in getting done **only** what God has authorized and thereby obligated us to do. Until a thing is authorized by the Scriptures, there are no options to consider in how to carry the obligation out. Thus, there is no option where there is no obligation. When one knows that a thing has been authorized he can then consider the options available whereby he can carry out God's will. **Do elders understand the aforementioned matters?**

The faithful child of God (certainly elders) will strive to choose the option that will **expedite** (get the matter accomplished in the quickest

and best way possible) whatever the obligation is. In other words, one chooses the option that provides greater advantage in getting the thing authorized accomplished. This is the underlying and fundamental meaning of “expedite.” It is the advantage involved in one option over another option that causes the more advantageous option to be chosen. Thus, said option will serve better than the other available options to get done whatever the obligation is that we are seeking to discharge. It should, therefore, be obvious to the serious student that elders do not simply select an option. Much thought and discussion, therefore, should go into deciding on the option(s) to discharge obligation(s). The very nature of the obligation will determine the thinking and deliberation needed to decide on the option(s) necessary to expedite the given obligation(s).

**All members of the church, especially elders, must learn that there can be no expedient where there is no obligation and there can be no obligation where there is no authorization.** To act when there is no authorization is presumptive on our part. It is a flagrant disregard for the authority of Christ in the New Testament. It is adding to the Word of God. Presumptive acts have always be condemned (Psa. 19:3; Deu. 4:2; Pro. 30:6; Rev. 22:18).

### **THE BIBLE DOCTRINE OF EXPEDIENCY (WHAT IS MOST ADVANTAGEOUS) AS IT RELATES TO CHOOSING ELDERS**

The singular sobering work of godly elders is seeing that what God has authorized is carried out in the quickest and best way possible, which means that elders and churches have a tremendous responsibility to permit **only** those men to serve whose appointment is **advantageous** to the Lord’s work in the congregation they superintend. *Men may be qualified, but it may not be expedient for them to work in the eldership.*

Faithful preachers of the gospel are traditionally “hired and fired” by elders based on whether or not they are advantageous to the work of the congregation they superintend. Preachers also make such decisions for the same reasons. Are their actions scripturally authorized (Col. 3:17)? (Not under consideration is a preacher discharged because of sin in his life or false teaching he expounds. Such a preacher should have practiced on him the scriptural discipline of the Bible. Also, not under consideration is a preacher who leaves a congregation

because of sin in the congregation that elders and church members will not correct. The proper teaching of the Scriptures in such cases must be applied to such a church.)

May preachers, Bible class teachers, treasurers, deacons, and, yes, elders themselves, be scripturally chosen or rejected by the same godly guidelines as just studied regarding obligation and option? Is it possible for a man who seeks the position of an elder to be scripturally qualified to serve in that capacity, yet not **expedient or advantageous** for him to do so in that particular congregation? Is it possible for a man who seeks the position of a preacher to be scripturally qualified to serve in that capacity, yet not **expedient or advantageous** for him to do so in a particular congregation? If these are not possibilities, then **how (by what guidelines)** do elderships choose from several faithful preachers which one is the preacher to do the work of an evangelist in the congregation they oversee? May elders not exercise the same prudent and wise thinking in who will serve with them as fellow elders, or who will serve as a deacon, Bible class teacher, treasurer, secretary, or any other position that expedites the work of the church? **Indeed, they should!**

All things being equal, elders are scripturally authorized to choose to do or not do things as well as select one person in the place of another person when all things and persons involved are scripturally authorized. It should go without saying that no one has Bible authority to choose things sinful.

### **HAVE WE TAKEN UP TOO MUCH SPACE IN OUR DISCUSSION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF AND HOW TO ASCERTAIN BIBLE AUTHORITY?**

The Lord's gospel and the Lord's church were restored because honest hearted, truth seeking, and obedient minded persons learned how to rightly divide the Word of truth (Luke 8:15, Mat. 5:6; John 7:17; 2 Tim. 2:15). Having learned that saving truth, they were determined to comply with it and contend for it at all costs. However, in time, like Israel of old, the church left the truth of the Bible to follow their own pernicious ways. The elders of the first century church were directly involved in this apostasy (Acts 20:29-31). This deviation from the truth occurred because men disregarded and abused the Scriptures rather than learn how to ascertain their authority and submit thereto.

### **Past Errors Due to Little or No Knowledge of How to Ascertain Bible Authority**

If elders had known **how** to ascertain Bible authority in the nineteenth century, they would not have supported the “missionary society,” the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God, and other activities resulting from doctrines which loosed men from what the Bible bound on them. Furthermore, in opposing such innovations, if elders had known **how** to ascertain Bible authority, they would not have run to the other extreme of “binding where God has not bound” in His Word. Yet, many opposed Bible colleges, Bible classes, women teachers, more than one container for the “fruit of the vine,” and other extremes of like nature. These reactions to liberalism in the nineteenth century happened because men were afraid of anything new, and without the correct understanding of how to ascertain Bible authority they fell victim to various forms of “anti-ism” (making laws for God). Hence, while the devil did not get these brethren by liberalism (loosing men from what God in the Bible bound on them), he caught them on the “rebound” because they did not know how to biblically defend the truth against liberalism. Of course, such ignorance, the aforementioned doctrines, as well as others, came over into the twentieth century.

In the past fifty years we have seen “anti” doctrines develop which bind where God has not bound in His Word. Doctrines that opposed “located preachers,” “orphan homes,” “church cooperation,” “eating in church buildings,” and “helping non-saints out of the church treasury.” All of these false doctrines resulted from lack of love for the truth and/or ignorance of how to ascertain Bible authority. Factionist preachers and members with their hobbies sowed their seeds of discord and too many elderships did not have the knowledge of how the Bible authorizes to be able to protect their flocks from error.

In the last thirty-five years liberalism, having captured most of the colleges operated by the brethren and using them for their key bases of operation, has carried congregation after congregation into apostasy. There is yet no end to this infamous process in sight.

Because elders did not love and respect the authority of the Bible (or because they did not know how to ascertain Bible authority and evaluate preachers and teachers in the light of it), they have been led

down the road of digression to apostate city. That wide gate and broad way of digression continues to be “bumper to bumper” with travelers to torment. However, if we are not careful, we will have reactionary moves against liberalism led by men who themselves are more full of fear of liberalism and respect for their own opinions than they are respectful of Bible authority and its application in defense of the Lord’s way. The sad result will be a reaction to liberalism that rebounds into some sort of “anti-ism.”

### **Liberalism in the Twentieth Century and Beyond**

Regarding those in the church today who “loose where God has not loosed in his word,” they are declaring the self-contradictory view that one cannot know absolute, objective, and humanly attainable truth. They oppose the proper rules of Bible interpretation. These “New Hermeneutikers” deny that the only way the Bible authorizes is by direct statements, examples, and implication. Their stupidity is revealed when they attempt to deny the manner in which the Bible authorizes by employing the same elements of communicative language that they oppose—namely, direct statements, examples, and implication. Moreover, such characters are so arrogantly bent on accomplishing their task that they cannot see their terrible inconsistencies. Such spiritual perverts believe that the church is a denomination; they have no problem with mechanical instruments of music in worship—or anything else that suits the fancy of their denominational, subjective, sectarian minds.

**Where are the elders in this religious charade?** What kind of men are they? Let us answer this question by referring to a bit of home-made history from yesteryear. Before the days of the rubberized baby pacifiers mothers had to make do with what was available to pacify their babies. Mothers would take a cloth, put sugar into the middle of it, and twist it in such a way as to make it possible for the fretful little one to nurse it. Because of our more highly refined age we cannot call this old-fashioned pacifier what our more simple, direct, and plain speaking agrarian grandparents (and J. D. Tant) called it. However, it describes the real character of the “elders” just mentioned. These psuedo-elders amount to no more than the “sugar-pacifiers” of long ago. They offer a sick, sweet, mushy, sentimentalism in the place of sound doctrine. They try to pass it off as biblical love and concern. Brethren, I believe that God had more in mind for elders than

that. The churches that crave this type of character and personality in their elders (and, yes, their preachers too) had just as well be labeled “The Sugar ‘Pacie’ Church of Christ.”

### **IF THE SHEPHERDS OF THE FLOCK DO NOT KNOW HOW TO ASCERTAIN BIBLE AUTHORITY, HOW CAN THEY DO THEIR WORK?**

Elders **must** know how to ascertain Bible authority and evaluate all things in the light of said authority. Elders **must** have the courage of their convictions, which convictions are based solely on what the New Testament of Jesus Christ authorizes. Elderships **must** understand that they are responsible to God to see that the church carries out in the quickest and best way possible what God wants His church to do (Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Pet. 5:2-4). Elders **must** make learning how to ascertain Bible authority their first and deepest concern. Until they do, the church will continue to limp from one apostasy to another in each generation.

Many secular vocations and professions held by elders require much study and learning for them to do their work correctly. How could any person who genuinely desires to do the work of a godly elder not take the necessary time and put forth the tremendous effort to learn how to ascertain Bible authority? How could any sensible, sober minded saint whom God has charged and holds responsible for keeping His church like He wants it, not take this matter seriously?

### **ELDERS HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO TEACH THE CHURCH IN HOW TO ASCERTAIN AND USE BIBLE AUTHORITY IN THEIR DAILY LIVES**

Elders **must** do all that is within their power to teach and train the church how to ascertain Bible authority and always do only that which is authorized (Col. 3:17). This means that they will see that the preachers and Bible teachers are faithful in life and doctrine. The church will constantly be caused to understand that proclaiming the same gospel and urging obedience to its conditions of pardon is the **only** way it can be produced and continued in any place in the world (Luke 8:11, 15). In this way, and this way only, are Christians produced and churches of Christ thereby brought into existence (Acts 11:26; 26:28; Rom. 16:16). It works this way because the seed of the

kingdom is the Word of God, and seed always produces after its kind (Luke 8:11; Gen. 1:11-12; Gal. 6:7-8).

### **ELDERS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

How can elders “tend the church of God” in all that the phrase implies when they do not know the mission of the church of Christ (1 Pet. 5:3)? The church is composed of all the saved on the earth. She is not a denomination. Elders must see that the church they oversee understands that the church of Christ is not a denomination. The Lord’s church existed long before religious leaders concocted the various and sundry denominations (Acts 2:22-47; Rom. 16:16).

The church’s mission is to save souls. She does this by preaching the gospel to the alien sinner, edifying the saints, and by benevolent work (Mark 16:15-16; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; Gal. 6:10; Jam. 1:27). In working in each one of these areas there are multitudinous details involved (Gal. 6:2, 10; Jam. 1:27).

### **ELDERS MUST GUARD THE CHURCH AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS**

Elders are “mouth stoppers.” Paul instructed Titus to teach elders to “exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers” (Tit. 1:9). They will hold up the hands of faithful members and, especially, gospel preachers who are aware and prepared to fight agnosticism, atheism, paganism, worldliness, and denominational subtleties from without and within the church.

Faithful elders understand that scriptural growth is always due to the power of the gospel and its distinctiveness in contrasts to the sweet platitudes of error. Elders who are truly God’s men understand that the truth should be taught in such a way that any honest hearted person can clearly see the difference in the true church and human churches (Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23; Col. 1:18).

God’s elders know the difference between authorized division and unauthorized division as well as authorized unity and unauthorized unity. Hence, they are not afraid and ashamed before God when, due to the truth of the gospel, they must separate themselves from ungodly church members. Conversely they are happy to fellowship **only** those who are in fellowship with God (Pro. 6:16-19; Psa. 127:1; 133:1; John 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Cor. 6:17; 1 John 1:7).

## **ELDERS OWE IT TO THE CHURCH TO SEE THAT SHE IS DISCIPLINED**

Within the church we routinely observe all manners practiced. We see animosity, pride, immorality, adultery, false teaching, unpaid debts, covetousness, hypocrisy, gossip, tale-bearing, lying, and various other transgressions of God's Word. The Bible is clear that God wants certain things done to and with unruly brethren (1 Cor. 5:2, 4-5, 13b; 2 The. 3:6). In the area of corrective discipline, Paul made it clear that the church at Corinth had a definite responsibility to an erring brother (1 Cor. 5:9). Elders are not faithful to their calling if they do not lead the church they superintend in following the instructions of the Word in encouragement and discipline (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-9; 6:1-7; 1 The. 5:14-15; 2 The. 3:6-15; 2 Tim. 2:24).

Goebel Music has written the following material on discipline.

The subjects of disciplinary action are: (1) one who sins against his brother and refuses to be reconciled (Mt. 5:23-24; 18:15-17), (2) those who cause division (Rom. 16:17; 2 Jn. 9-11; 1 Tim. 1:20; Tim. 3:10), (3) those who sin and walk disorderly (1 Tim. 5:20; II Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:1-5, 9-13) and (4) those who bring or teach a different or new doctrine (1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Jn. 9-11). Disciplinary action for these is designed to: (1) save the soul of the erring one (II Thess. 3:14; 1 Cor. 5:5), (2) save the souls of the other members of the church (1 Cor. 5:1-8; Rev. 2:20f), (3) to save the souls of the world (Phil. 2:15-16; Mt. 5:16; Acts 5:11), (4) to cause the rest of us to examine our own lives (1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Cor. 13:5) and (5) to show that the church is subject to Christ in all things (II Cor. 2:9). Such action may be described as major surgery to save a soul, keep others from being contaminated, reflecting the divine light in our practice of that which is a "light unto our paths," a constant reminder that we are in need of self-examination, and proving our loyalty to Christ and his Word by being in subjection. Such action, to be effective, must be enforced by each individual member of the church. Withdrawal of fellowship is not a mere ceremony said by the elders in which it is announced that fellowship has been withdrawn from brother "A." To be effective in fulfilling its purpose, this discipline must be led by the elders and executed by each individual member in withdrawing their social and religious fellowship from the sinful member, in accordance with the elders' instruction book, the Bible (II Cor. 2:6; II Thess. 3:14; 1 Cor. 5:11). Rather than seeing church discipline as a violation of love, I would view it as an appeal to the highest degree of brotherly love and divine love that can be in us (1 Jn. 2:3-6; Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 3:16).<sup>1</sup>

To the extent that we fail to practice scriptural church discipline, we fail that much to correctly honor God and to be the church that Jesus

built and purchased with His own precious blood (Mat. 16:18; Acts 2; 20:28). Elders must understand themselves, and cause the church to understand, that the church is the light of the world in preaching, practicing, and defending the gospel (Rom. 1:16; John 12:48; Mat. 24:35; Rom. 2:16). Through the church, God does His work in saving the souls of men.

Brethren, preachers may go wrong, deacons may be immoral, Bible class teachers derelict in their duty, and every member of the church trying to engage in sin. **QUESTION:** Who did God put into the organizational structure of the church to keep her like He wants her to be? *The answer is the elders.*

### CONCLUSION

Elders owe it to the church to remind her that she is the only medium through which God is going to do His work. God established and ordered the church and, therefore, it is not ours to tamper with (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5; Eph. 3:10; Acts 13:1-3; 14:25-28; 11:27-30). God's elders must investigate and know the members—who is orderly and who is disorderly. As each case demands, elders are to encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, and deal with offenses both private and public. Furthermore, they owe it to the church to scripturally deal with the idle, disorderly, and the heretic (Tit. 3:10-11).

The elders owe it to the church to love her and seek her peace as God defines love and peace (2 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 4:3; 5:25-32). Elders are to prove their love to the church by teaching, training, and directing her in the pathways of righteousness (Psa. 23). Jesus said, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Mat. 7:20). This sentiment is as true concerning knowing the quality of the elders' love for God and His church as it is with anyone else in the body of Christ. Let those of us who love God, the gospel, the church, and the godly elders whom God has placed over her to superintend her, submit to these God-ordained watchers for our souls, "as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>Goebel Music, "Elders—Their duty To Keep the Church Pure," *The Spiritual Sword*, Thomas B. Warren, ed. (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ), Vol. 9, No. 3 (April 1978): 17.

# MEMBERS' DUTY TO ELDERS

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## INTRODUCTION

God has ordained that men be selected to serve as elders in the church. Men who meet the qualifications the Bible has specified for elders are appointed to this special task. Certain instructions are given the elders as they exercise the oversight of the local congregation. It is certain that no man who is appointed to the eldership is the perfect man, free of sin (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). Each man who is appointed to this high office must be a man of character against whom a charge of misconduct cannot be sustained. He is a man who commands the respect of the congregation by his Christian demeanor, his knowledge of the Word of God, and his abilities to lead. This lecture is not addressing the qualifications required to serve as an elder, but rather briefly describing the character of the leadership the congregation is required to follow.

God has not left His church without authority. Deity, the Godhead, is composed of God the Father (Eph. 5:20), God the Son (John 1:1-3), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). God the Father sent His only Son to the earth to redeem mankind from sin (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Phi. 2:5-8). Jesus claimed the authority of the Father (Mat. 28:18) while He was on the earth. He promised that, after His death, the Holy Spirit would come to reveal to His apostles all they were to teach (John 16:13; Gal. 1:6-9, 11-12). The apostles confirmed the Word

they revealed by signs and wonders (Mark 16:20). They were able to pass on to others the gifts of the Spirit for the purpose of proving the validity of what they were preaching. After the death of the apostles and those upon whom they had laid their hands, the miraculous measure of proof ceased. It was only through the written Word that the authority of God was conveyed to the people after that time. The Bible, as it was revealed by the Holy Spirit to those who penned it (2 Tim. 3:16-17), became the final and ultimate authority by which God communicates with mankind. Jesus stated that God's Word is Truth (John 17:17), and the Truth will make men free (John 8:32).

The Bible records the purpose of the coming of the Christ to the earth. Jesus said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). This was to be accomplished through the church. Jesus promised to build His church (Mat. 16:18), and it would be through the church that men could be saved from sin (Eph. 5:25-27).

Therefore, we have the overall plan of God: The Father sent His Son Jesus to redeem His people from sin; Jesus built His church through which men could be saved; He sent the Holy Spirit to reveal to the apostles what men must do to be saved; the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus' Word to those who wrote it down for posterity; the apostles confirmed the Word by signs and wonders (miracles). The Word became the final authority of God on the earth.

Now, where do we go from here? Has God just left us to follow our own way with regard to our salvation? The answer is, of course, NO! God knew the need for leaders in His kingdom, the church. He authorized the appointment of men of unquestioned Christian character and knowledge to serve as bishops, shepherds, overseers, or elders in the individual congregations. These men would serve as guides, leaders, superintendents, overseers, rulers, shepherds, examples for the members of the congregations to follow. These men are responsible for the welfare of the congregation: they are charged with the spiritual development and protection of each member. Their authority is limited by the authority of the Bible. Their responsibility is to see that God's instructions in His Word are carried out in the way that He instructed that they be carried out. They have no other authority than that which has been given to them by the inspired Word of God.

Elders, therefore, are men who have been delegated the authority of God to see that the church continues true to His Word and for the guidance of the congregation in the way of salvation.

### **MEMBERS' DUTY REGARDING THE SELECTION OF ELDERS**

The selection process for the appointment to the eldership is of utmost importance. There is no biblically prescribed process for selecting elders except the qualifications involved for those to be appointed. Paul informed Timothy that those who desired the office of a bishop desired a good work. The qualifications for that good work are then given by Paul. However, no process for the selection of men meeting these qualifications is given. Paul instructed Titus, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Tit. 1:5). Titus was told to ordain elders in every city but was not charged with the task of selecting men to be ordained. Paul and Barnabas "ordained elders in every church" in their return from their first missionary tour in Asia. Again, they ordained men to the eldership, but it is not apparent that they selected them.

Because of the nature of the qualifications, it is necessary that, for a man to be considered for this high responsibility, he must be known and respected by the congregation. He must be known by the congregation to be a man who is blameless with respect to his morality, honesty, and integrity; one who controls his family with love and discipline; an abstainer from alcoholic beverages; not a novice; a peaceable person, not contentious or self-willed; and capable of teaching God's Word correctly. All of the qualifications point to the ultimate conclusion that those who are to be leaders in the congregation are to be selected by the congregation itself. This was the procedure selected by the apostles in choosing men to tend to the daily ministrations of the Grecian widows in Acts 6. They charged the people: "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business" (Acts 6:3). The people were the ones who knew best those men who fit the qualifications given by the apostles.

There is a duty on the part of members that is crucial. In the selection process, it is critical that a man be selected on the basis of the qualifications listed in the Bible, **not** on the basis of his popularity or

business capabilities. The responsibility of the spiritual direction of the congregation cannot be placed in the hands of men who know neither the Word of God nor the significance of his office. It is difficult to comprehend the gravity of the elders' work. It is difficult to separate the physical attributes of a man from his spiritual qualities. To select men for the eldership who may have good business acumen (but who lack in spiritual maturity) will produce nothing but inadequate and dangerous leadership in the Lord's church.

### **MEMBERS' DUTY REGARDING ATTITUDE TOWARD ELDERS**

Elders are also known as shepherds. The Greek word, *poimen*, literally means "shepherd" or "pastor." It enjoins upon those who bear this esteemed title to "feed" the flock. Paul admonished the elders of the church in Ephesus to "take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). *Feed* (Greek *poimaino*) means to "act as a shepherd." *Tend* would be an appropriate rendering of the word to indicate that the shepherd does more than just feed his flock—he takes care of them in every respect. Peter charged the elders to "feed the flock" (1 Pet. 5:2), using the same word meaning to tend to the flock.

Those who faithfully exercise the function of a shepherd deserve the devotion of those they lead. The sheep follow the lead of the shepherd, knowing they will receive the benefit of his leadership. They depend on him for their pasture. The Psalmist beautifully depicted the Christ as a Shepherd in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: "The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psa. 23:1-2). Jesus also added, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). The apostle Peter implied the role of shepherds to the elders charging them (and him, being an elder also) to be "ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:1-3), and saying: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:4).

Paul also wrote by inspiration:

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; *And* to esteem them very high-

ly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves (1 The. 5:12-13).

This is a beautiful expression. Paul first "beseeches." He pleads with them to recognize and realize the significance of the work the elders do. It is the Greek, *eratao*, defined by Strong: "to ask, beseech, desire, entreat, pray." He then acknowledges their three-fold function: (1) They labor among you. The office of elder is not one of title only. There is a great work to do. He has the awesome responsibility of feeding the flock the right kind of spiritual food; he has the thankless task of protecting the flock from the forces of evil that would destroy the church and take away the souls of the members. He has the delicate duty of rebuking members who misconduct themselves and bring reproach upon the Lord's body.

(2) They are over you in the Lord. The elders are the men who have been selected by the congregation to lead them in the way of righteousness. They have been given the delegated authority of God to guide the church according to the will of God. It is not their prerogative to make rules where God has not made rules, nor can they choose to ignore rules that God has made. They have the authority to oversee the spiritual activities and pursuits of the congregation to insure they are in harmony with the Bible, God's ultimate authority. In this respect they are over the congregation by the authority of God.

(3) They admonish you. People become lax in their work. They falter in respect to their zeal and enthusiasm. They become lackadaisical with regard to responsibility. They become generally lazy and irresponsible in their focus on the church and its work. There comes a time when people need to be encouraged, admonished, and even rebuked for their failures to live up to the standard they have elected to be their own. Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Leaders in every endeavor are faced with keeping their forces focused in the right direction. Elders are no less responsible for the actions of the flock. Those under their oversight should have a great appreciation for the elders who are charged with their eternal destiny and who are diligent to exercise that charge.

Paul says the congregation is to "know them." This is another indication that those who are to serve in the eldership are men who are well known and loved by the congregation. It would be difficult for

the congregation to willingly follow the leadership of someone they did not know well enough to have confidence in them sufficient to trust the destiny of their souls.

In First Thessalonians 5:13, Paul charges the congregation to “esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” Among the many synonyms for *esteem* is the word, “hold.” To hold in one’s mind a very high respect is appropriate for the feeling of admiration for those who occupy the office of an elder.

It is commonplace in our democratic society to exercise our constitutional right of free speech. Often this privilege expresses itself in unreserved criticism, deprecation, and insults toward those in public office. The church is not a democratic organization! It is the church which Jesus purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and belongs to Him. It is an autocracy, meaning rule by one person with unlimited power. Jesus is that unlimited power, and that power was given Him by His Heavenly Father. For those under the delegated authority of the one with unlimited power to challenge that authority is to challenge the authority of the Christ Himself. This is a very dangerous practice. However, it is a practice that is taking place all too often in the church.

This does not mean that the people in the congregation cannot disagree with the eldership. In fact, it is necessary, under certain circumstances, to disagree with the elders. The elders do not always make the right decisions according to the Bible. When it is obvious that a decision has been made that is contrary to Bible authority (or will lead to activities that are contrary to biblical practices), then something must be done. No one is required to follow the lead of anyone who would lead them into religious error. The attitude that is displayed toward the elders under these conditions must be gentle, entreating, and imploring—never rebellious or threatening. Men of the right spirit, which certainly should characterize the men in the eldership, will carefully consider and appreciate the concerns expressed in the right manner with the right attitude.

To challenge the authority of the elders puts one in the same unenviable category with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in Numbers 16. Korah was of the priestly tribe of Levi (Num. 16:1). He challenged the authority of Moses as the leader of the Israelites. God caused the earth to swallow up these three men with their families and consumed

250 of their followers with fire. Miriam, the sister of Moses, complained of his position, and God caused her to be leprous (Num. 12) until Moses interceded on her behalf.

If the men who comprise the eldership are men who possess the qualifications (as they are given in First Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, and First Peter 5:1-3), and exercise the duties of the office they are charged to fill, then it is the duty of the members to look up to them as men who are special in the kingdom of God—men who command the respect and honor of those under their oversight.

### MEMBERS' DUTY REGARDING SERVICE UNDER ELDERS

The writer of Hebrews states: “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation” (Heb. 13:7). Further, in the same chapter, he admonishes: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

These passages make it incumbent upon the members to yield to the leadership of the elders. It is the inspired revelation of God that enjoins upon the members of a local congregation to honor the wisdom and leadership of the elders. In these verses, the writer specifies:

(1) **We are to remember the elders.** This just means that we are to acknowledge their office of authority. They have the rule over us. It also means that we are to look to the elders for direction in our worship and practice. They have “spoken unto us the word of God.” We are not at liberty to take unto ourselves a practice, or to alter the acts of worship in any way without their knowledge and approval. Their approval must be in harmony with the Bible. We are to remember they have the oversight of the congregation. For a congregation not to have organization would result in chaotic confusion and disorder when it came to the worship services—or in any work the church may wish to undertake. There must be a standard in anything we do, and the eldership is the standard to which we look as it is in harmony with the ultimate standard, the Bible. The church is not left without a head (Eph. 1:22-23). The congregation is also controlled by the designated authority, the elders.

(2) **We are to follow their faith.** It is imperative that men in the eldership have the knowledge of the Bible sufficient to display true faith in their lives. When this happy circumstance prevails, then the members can, with confidence, follow their faithful leadership. This is just another viable reason for respecting and honoring men in this worthy work. Elders who live according to the Bible, who teach the members the way of truth, are worthy of following. It seems that in every congregation there are those who want to cause confusion and doubt regarding the leadership of the elders. It is divisive for one to be guilty of this quality. Those who display this characteristic need to be marked for their purpose. We are not suggesting that such be disfellowshipped unless they become so intent in their diversion that they fall into the category of the disorderly brother mentioned in Second Thessalonians 3:6. They do need to be identified, however, for their penchant to sow discord among the brethren.

(3) **We are to obey the elders.** The elders spend hours and hours planning the work and activities of the local congregation. The work of the church is to save souls. This is accomplished by evangelism: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15); edification of the saints:

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16);

and tending to the needs of others: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jam. 1:27). These three general areas of responsibility cover a host of individual opportunities. The obligation for these three areas of work are given in the three passages mentioned plus many more. The **how** of meeting those obligations falls into the realm of expediency. This is the area in which the elders operate. There are many ways in which these obligations can be accomplished. Methods decided upon by the elders (perhaps with suggestions from members) should be accepted by every member of the congregation. With full cooperation on the part of individual members, much can be accomplished to the glory of God because of the diligence of the elders.

(4) **We are to submit ourselves to the authority of the elders.** To be in submission merely means to recognize the elders as the leaders to whom we turn for guidance. This does not, in any sense of the word, relegate members to a dependence upon the elders to tell them what they must believe with regard to the Bible. Every member is to “study to shew thyself approved” (2 Tim. 2:15) and is responsible for his own conduct (1 Tim. 3:15). We do not, as members, have the authority to undertake spiritual activities on our own without the knowledge and consent of the elders for what we do. There have been many instances in the church of members starting so-called Bible classes in their homes on certain nights in which divisive suggestions have been fostered. Activities of this nature serve to undermine the harmony and peace of the congregation.

One plan was submitted that a committee be formed to receive suggested activities from the congregation, refine the suggestions to conform to the pleasure of the committee, discuss the final draft with the congregation for their approval, then submit the plan to the elders for their approval. Since the program had already been approved by the congregation, what would be the response if the elders disapproved the plan? The answer is, of course, that the elders would be pitted against the wishes and desires of the congregation which would lead to disharmony in the church. This type of thinking is not submitting ourselves to the elders as the leaders of the congregation.

All these things are required of the members as they serve under the authority and guidance of the elders. The reason is that they (the elders) may give an account before God that is favorable for the welfare of the souls of each one. It would give joy to the heart of elders to be able to give a favorable account of faithful brethren, and it would also bring grief to their heart to have to give an unfavorable account of the wayward.

### **MEMBERS' DUTY REGARDING DISCIPLINE**

It is a sad, unpleasant task to discipline. Parents take no joy in having to discipline a child. Discipline, in the sense of exerting correction, always involves misbehavior. A good parent does not discipline a child as a result of good behavior, but rather commends the child. When a child misbehaves, he brings the necessity of discipline. The same is true in the Lord's church. The elders are not the standard by which behavior is determined to be good or bad. The Bible is the au-

thority in every case. However, the elders are charged with the oversight of the congregation. Therefore, when a member violates the precepts of the Bible, or its authority, then steps must be taken to correct the guilty member.

The purpose of correction, or discipline, is to bring the wayward member back to his rightful place in the congregation in the right relationship with God. Assuming the elders have exercised every avenue of effort to correct the guilty member (to which he has not responded) brings the necessity of discipline. The Bible is clear regarding this function in the church: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 The. 3:6). In this passage, Paul issues a command. This is not an option on the part of the church. *Withdraw*, in the sense given here, means to have nothing to do with, to avoid, to have no company with, as it is stated in verse 14: "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." The cause for this action is given to "every brother that walketh disorderly." To *walk disorderly* means not to live in harmony with the teaching of the Bible. Paul wrote to the church in Rome:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

*Walking disorderly*, in Second Thessalonians 3:6 is comparable to Paul's admonition to the Roman Christians to mark them which "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned." Whatever it is that causes discord and division in the church must be corrected.

The elders, being the overseers or shepherds of the flock, have the responsibility of initiating whatever discipline is needed to restore the sinful brother or sister. However, it is very important to note that the instructions Paul gave in this respect were given to the church—not just to the elders. It would do little good for the elders to initiate the withdrawal of fellowship from a wayward member if the congregation continued to fellowship such an one without reservation. This, sadly, is the situation in many, many instances. The members have a very

definite responsibility and duty to the elders to honor the decision to discipline members who misbehave and bring reproach upon themselves and the Lord's church. It is not for the purpose of "kicking someone out of the church," or, as is done in some denominations, "excommunicating" someone. It is for the purpose of restoring them to the love and safety of the Lord. Paul was plain in the purpose of withdrawal of fellowship: "Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother" (2 The. 3:15).

It is only when a sinning brother or sister, who still has a conscience that can be touched, realizes that he or she is not going to be accorded the welcome arms of his or her brethren that discipline will accomplish its purpose. This can only occur if the members discharge their duty to the elders as they should.

### CONCLUSION

We have discussed in this lesson the duties of the members of a local congregation to the elders of that congregation. We noticed some introductory matters concerning this subject, and the members' duties: (1) regarding the selection of elders, (2) regarding the proper attitude toward elders, (3) regarding service under elders, and (4) regarding discipline.

These are vital matters if the church is going to function in harmony with Bible authority. The elders face a difficult task. The stakes are high, the responsibility is grave, and sometimes the decisions are hard. However, the members must realize that good elders are there for a purpose—a purpose designed in the mind of God. That purpose is to lead the church in such a way that heaven will be the home for all under their care.

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# ELDER—ELDER, DEACON, PREACHER RELATIONS

*Billy Bland*



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Billy has done local work in Tennessee and Mississippi; he also has held gospel meetings in several states, Canada, and Russia. He speaks on several brotherhood lectureships each year. Billy is the Dean of Students and an instructor at the Memphis School of Preaching. He also directs campaign work for the school and is director of mission work in Murmansk, Russia, coordinating quarterly trips to this city. He has made seven trips to date. Billy was recently appointed an elder in the Coldwater Church of Christ, Coldwater, Mississippi, where he formerly preached for twelve years.

## INTRODUCTION

It has often been observed that hardly any church rises higher than its leaders. If the leadership of a congregation is alert and active, then so is the congregation. If, on the other hand, the leaders of a congregation are asleep and apathetic, then so is the congregation. This, of course, leaves the door wide-open for the wolf, which results in sheep scattered and devoured.

The church is an exhibit of “the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10-11). It is composed of two sides, the divine side and the human side. Since God, in His infinite wisdom, organized and established the church, one cannot improve on the divine arrangement. To attempt to do so is to lead the church into apostasy and failure. Paul warned the Ephesian elders of this very thing:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of

your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:28-31).

As church historians know, apostasy did come, and it came among the leaders (the elders). Elders being exalted above their role soon escalated into the pope (who is nothing more than an apostate “overgrown” elder). Thus, any attempt to improve upon the divine side of the church results in apostasy. Thank God for the divine pattern of the church.

As earlier stated, the church is also composed of its human side. Herein, is where improvement can be made. God has ordained that there be “elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). These, men are to serve as the “bishops” or “overseers” of the congregation in which they serve. Other scriptural designations for these men are “pastors” or “shepherds.” The local church is also to be served by a group of qualified men known as “deacons.” Paul, in writing to the church in Philippi, addressed “all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phi. 1:1). In addition to the bishops and deacons, the local church may choose to select a qualified man to serve as a located preacher. The apostle Paul stayed several years at various locations in order to preach and teach, establishing an approved example of a located preacher (see Acts 11:26; 18:11; 20:31; etc.). Most congregations see the need and the wisdom of having a “located preacher,” who may devote himself fully to the work of an evangelist. This man, being fully supported, can devote himself to teaching and preaching of the Word of God to the community as well as to the church. This arrangement, of course, doesn’t relieve the other members of the church of their responsibilities to do the same. More souls are brought to Christ, however, when there is a man who may devote himself fully to the study and teaching of God’s Word.

In order for the church to reach its goal there must be a harmonious relationship between the elders, deacons, and preachers. The Savior’s statement, “and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand” (Mat. 12:25), is certainly true regarding the leadership of the church. Unity among leaders is essential for strength. Solomon gives the following observations relative to unity.

Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.  
For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him *that is* alone

when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm *alone*? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ecc. 4:9-12).

Just as a threefold cord is not quickly broken, neither is an eldership quickly or easily overcome by error if they are all standing together as one with the Word of God as their standard and the salvation of souls as their goal. This particular lesson will confine itself to “practical” aspects of the relationship between the elders, deacons, and preachers. Other lessons in this book address the subject of qualifications of these. Hopefully, this lesson will serve as sort of a “how to” approach relative to working together among the elders, deacons, and preachers.

### ELDER—ELDER RELATIONSHIP

As previously noted, God stated there is to be a plurality of men serving as elders of a congregation (Acts 14:23). Paul addressed the “bishops” of the church at Philippi, not “the bishop of the church.” Even human wisdom can see the need to have a multiplicity of men overseeing the work in order to keep a “Diotrephes” from “taking over” the church (3 John 9-10).

First, each elder should understand that he serves under Christ as the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Elders have authority, but it is delegated authority from Christ. Elders have no right to change any matter of faith (doctrine), given from God. Thus, each elder must willingly submit himself to Christ, the head of the church.

Second, elders must realize that authority lies in the **eldership**, and not in one elder. Trouble soon arises when one elder authorizes a particular matter which has not been discussed by the other elders. This is not only unscriptural, but helps create suspicion and distrust among the elders. On one occasion, a group of ladies from a neighboring congregation in another town came to the town where I preached and sang to the Methodist church. When I questioned the elders of the neighboring church about this matter, it was revealed that these ladies had asked one elder and upon his decision, the ladies “performed” to the Methodist church, where, of course, both men and women were present. This unscriptural act was done when only one elder was involved in the decision. How may an elder stop such a thing from happening where he serves? The elders must have an agreement among themselves not to make a decision for the entire eldership.

When asked relative to a particular work or action that is scriptural, an elder should refrain from giving his “personal view” until he has consulted with the other elders. This will prevent the appearance of a divided eldership if the other elders decide the opposite of the elder that was first confronted about this matter. When asked relative to an unscriptural matter, of course, one should say, “this is unscriptural, and therefore sinful.” Elders may only give permission to conduct works that are in themselves scriptural.

Third, elders must have respect for one another. Elders must work together, which of course requires respect for one another. The many passages that instruct Christians to love one another certainly apply to the elders. Consequently, elders will avoid a quarrelsome or contentious attitude. Does this mean there will never be any disagreement among the elders? Of course, not. Elders can disagree with one another without being quarrelsome or contentious. Again, keep in mind, we are discussing things that are in themselves scriptural, and are in the area of judgment. Elders are often required to make decisions in matters of judgment, such as: the time of services, whom to ask to serve in a particular area of work, what type of personal evangelism program to use, which good work to financially support, etc.

How can elders assure that proper respect and cooperation is maintained in the eldership? First, carefully avoid treating a newly appointed elder as though he is a “junior elder.” Elders that have served for a number of years should not run “rough-shod” over younger elders. Second, encourage each elder to fully express his view. Even if the eldership doesn’t agree with his judgment, he at least was allowed to have input into the decision that was made. Third, if a majority of the elders decide on a particular way or work, all the elders should support such. One elder should not be allowed to block or “blackball” a decision of the eldership. If this happens, then what results is a “one man” ruling in the eldership, which is unscriptural. When a work is presented to the congregation, the elders should stand as one. Remember what Jesus said relative to a divided house (Mat. 12:25). This writer has personally known of a situation where the eldership made a decision to stop supporting a particular work, but then one elder visited the members and informed them that he did not agree with this decision. This resulted in embarrassment and removing of that elder. Brother N. B. Hardeman used to state that he “had rather be the sol-

dier that thrust the spear in the side of the Savior's body on the cross, than to be the one guilty of dividing the spiritual body of the Lord—the church." Jesus gave His physical body for His spiritual body (Eph. 5:25). No one can divide the Lord's spiritual body with impunity!

In contrast to the above, this writer has also known of an occasion when one elder was opposed to a major decision that affected the future of a local congregation. The other elders felt that the decision must be made contrary to the view of the one elder that was expressing his disapproval. After expressing his views, finally this elder decided that he would go along with all the other elders. When the matter was presented to the members of the church, this elder was an enthusiastic supporter of this work. Such resulted in a united eldership as well as a united membership. This elder today ranks high in my admiration, due to his ability to work as a team member with the other elders. One can obviously see the need of the qualification "not self-willed" in an elder.

Previous to the seven "ones" of the unity of the Spirit, Paul first addressed the attitude that all should possess for this unity to prevail.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

Paul, although an apostle, wrote as one that was **beseeching** (begging) them to walk worthy of their calling. He writes that a Christian's attitude is one of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearing one another in love. Not only must one be right in doctrine, but he must also be right in attitude and actions toward his brethren. These ingredients of unity are certainly a must among the elders of the local church.

Elders should also help to keep one another strong spiritually. One of the duties of the elders is to stop the mouths of the false teachers (Tit. 1:11). This requires that the elders be spiritually strong. With the departures that are taking over many congregations, it is a must that elders personally commit themselves to growth through Bible study and staying alert to the various false doctrines in and out of the church. If elders would obey the command of stopping the mouths of false teachers, then many false teachers so prevalent today would not

have the platform on which to teach their error among God's people. The wise shepherds protect the flock, not invite the wolves into their very midst. Thank God for elders who are alert and concerned about fulfilling all that God commands of them (cf., Gen. 6:22).

### ELDERS-DEACONS RELATIONSHIP

A congregation that is scripturally and fully organized will have a plurality of men who serve as elders (who serve as “overseers” and shepherds of the flock), and “deacons” (who are special servants selected to perform various tasks of the church). As long as a local congregation is alert, alive, and active, there will always be work to do. If these works are to be completed in an effective manner, there must be harmony between the elders and deacons of the church.

The word *deacon* comes from a Greek word meaning “minister, servant, waiter or attendant.”<sup>1</sup> The basic meaning of the word, therefore, carries the idea of a servant. The qualifications of the deacons are found in First Timothy, chapter three.

It is imperative in the relationship between the elders and deacons that all who fill these roles understand the nature of their work. The elders are the only overseers of the church. It is not the case that the elders and the deacons oversee the church. It is possible that some have the mistaken idea that the elders oversee the spiritual functions of the church, while the deacons oversee the physical (or material) functions of the church. The truth is that the elders oversee all aspects of the church, both spiritual and material. The deacons (as all other members) serve under the oversight of the elders.

Brother Cleon Lyles gives two examples of problems that may arise if this distinction is not clear. The first example involved a deacon who was the “keeper of the purse.” For years this one man made solitary decisions regarding the finances of the church. He honestly thought that was his job. Fortunately, he was an humble man, who wanted to do right and, when confronted regarding such, promptly corrected the matter. The elders were wrong in allowing this practice to have ever begun. The second example, however, wasn't so pleasant. When the elders decided to dismiss the preacher, the deacons rebelled against the decision of the elders. Since they believed they were over the material aspects of the church, they decided to continue to pay the salary of the preacher. This, of course, resulted in a division of the church.<sup>2</sup> The aforementioned examples show just how impor-

tant it is to distinguish between the two works of the elders and the deacons.

While the functions of the elders and deacons are different, they can and must work together. The deacons perform an essential function in the Lord's cause. When a need arose in the Jerusalem church, the apostles instructed the congregation:

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:3-7).

While it may be debated whether or not these were deacons, the point here is that special servants fulfilled a vital role in taking care of feeding the widows, while the apostles were able to continue their work. The result was peace and growth of the Lord's church.

The very word *deacon* (which indicates a servant), shows that one who serves in this capacity is willing to do **whatever** he can to further the cause of Christ. In so doing, he is performing a great work in the Kingdom of God.

Just as it is imperative that deacons understand their role, it is also imperative that deacons be assigned specific tasks and then be allowed to perform those tasks. Someone has observed that, in congregations which are not proficient in their work, "preachers do the work of the elders, the elders do the work of the deacons, and the deacons do nothing." While this may be an overstatement, it may reveal a common problem. To avoid these problems, elders should assign the deacons certain works to carry out. The deacons do not have to do all the work themselves, but they should see that the work is completed and report such to the elders. Below is an example of how deacons may be appointed over certain works within the church.

#### MAINTENANCE

\_\_\_\_\_ is the deacon appointed to oversee this phase of the work under the oversight of the elders. His duties are as follows:

1. Check building and parking lot for needed repairs and see that repairs are made.

2. Get estimates for major repairs.
3. Oversee all repairs to ensure they are completed in a proper and timely manner.
4. Oversee the cleaning of the building and provide the proper cleaning supplies.
5. See that the yard and lot are mowed as needed.
6. Perform any other duty as requested by the elders.

### EDUCATION

\_\_\_\_\_ is the deacon appointed to oversee this phase of the work under the oversight of the elders. His duties are as follows:

1. Appoint teachers for all classes on Sunday morning and Wednesday night.
2. Make sure all teachers are in their classes for each service.
3. Get substitute teacher when regular teacher is not present.
4. Have regular teachers meetings.
5. Provide the necessary teaching supplies for each class.
6. Rotate teachers quarterly.
7. Teachers are to be selected from a list of individuals approved by the elders.
8. Perform any other duty as requested by the elders.<sup>3</sup>

Other areas of duties may be assigned, such as: Finance, Visitation, Worship, and Benevolence. Notice from the above examples that each deacon is serving under the oversight of the elders. The deacons are given **specific** tasks to perform. They are allowed the freedom to accomplish their task, making decisions that are necessary. Major decisions are to be cleared by the elders. Other duties may also be asked of them. They are not limited to the assigned duty list.

It is wise that the elders and deacons have meetings periodically. The deacons could be given various assignments, and reports from the deacons could be given at these meetings. The deacons can offer good suggestions in various areas to the elders. The elders should be careful, however, in reaching decisions in these meetings. If elders make decisions in these meetings, there could be division among the elders regarding some matter, and the deacons could involve themselves in the elders' decision, which, in effect, may force the deacons into the role of elders. It would be wise for the elders to listen carefully to the deacons and tell them that the elders will make a decision and get back with them soon.

There should be mutual respect among the elders and deacons. The elders are not to be lords over Gods' heritage, but rather examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3). The words of Jesus should be remembered by

both the elders and the deacons: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mat. 7:12).

The deacons need and deserve encouragement from time to time. While they do not serve for the applause of men, they deserve the honor that is due them. Not only is such encouragement good for the deacons, it is also good for the work of the church. Any diligent worker is happy when his work is appreciated; he will devote himself to his job when he knows it is effective. Thank God for dedicated deacons!

### **ELDERS-PREACHER RELATIONSHIP**

It is vitally important that the eldership and the preacher work together in a close relationship. The Holy Spirit often connected these two works in the pages of the Bible. Evangelists and pastors are closely linked in Ephesians 4:11, where Paul is discussing spiritual gifts. Likewise, evangelists and preachers are closely linked in the pages of First and Second Timothy, as well as in the book of Titus. These last three books are written to evangelists, and yet they speak of the qualifications and work of the elders.

Although working in different roles, the elders and preacher must work together. They are working for the same ultimate goal—the salvation of souls. When elders and preachers work contrary to one another, much harm is done to the body of Christ. If each understands his role and humbly works together without resentment and distrust, a long, fruitful work can result in a strong church and salvation of souls. Having served in both areas as a preacher and now an elder, this writer has a great appreciation of both works. Both works carry with them grave responsibilities and certain “strains.” The elders and the preacher must be aware and sympathetic with each others’ work.

If a preacher is to be effective in his work, he must first have a clear understanding of just what his work is and is not.

It is not the work of a preacher to be “the overseer” or “the pastor” of the congregation. The pastoral system of Denominationalism is both wrong and sinful. God never appointed a preacher as “the pastor” of a local church. Under certain circumstances, a preacher may serve as one of the pastors, but he is not “the pastor.” Elders have the oversight of the church and will give account as such (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17).

It is not the work of the preacher to be a leader in the civic affairs of the community. He may choose to be in some civic club, or the P.T.A., but such is not his responsibility as the preacher.

It is not his responsibility to be the one who makes all the “social contacts” for the church. He may make some, but one must remember that all Christians are to be “salt” and “light” (Mat. 5:13-16).

It is not the work of the preacher to do all the visiting for the church. The preacher who is doing his job as both a Christian and a preacher will visit. But again, all Christians have the responsibility to visit (Mat. 25:31-46). The elders, as shepherds of the souls committed to their care, have special responsibilities to visit the sheep. James admonished, “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church” (Jam. 5:14). Although elders today cannot anoint one with oil, the principle of calling the elders is certainly still essential. When a sheep goes astray, a good shepherd will seek such till he finds it (Luke 15:1-7).

The work of the preacher, first and foremost, is to preach the Word. In Paul’s last inspired recorded writings, we have the following charge given to the evangelist, Timothy:

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

This is a very serious and solemn charge! The preacher will one day give account as to how he has carried out this responsibility given to his trust. He is to “preach the word,” not the doctrines and commandments of men. He is to do this “in season and out of season.” Involved in this is reproving, rebuking, and exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine. It is not to be done in an air of arrogance and pride, but with love and humility.

The elders should see that the preacher is not burdened with unnecessary burdens so he may fully devote himself to his work. He should not have to do the work of elders or deacons.

The elders should see that the preacher is given ample time and preparation for his study. A preacher who quits studying soon will lose his power and effectiveness. The power is in the Word of God, and a preacher who doesn't study the Word loses that "power" (Rom. 1:16).

Elders and preachers need to assist and uphold each other's hands. The elders and the preacher must be loyal to one another. The elders can help shield the preacher from unnecessary criticism. When a worldly, disgruntled member doesn't like the preaching of God's Word, the elders should not allow his criticism to hinder the preacher's work. Neither should the preacher allow such an one to manipulate him against the elders. There is wisdom in God's command, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses" (1 Tim. 5:19). If there is sin in the life of an elder or a preacher; such, of course, must be dealt with in a scriptural manner.

For there to be in harmony in the relationship between elders and preacher, the preacher must respect the opinions of the elders. He must remember that the elders are men of wisdom and experience. There may be a valid reason why the elders did not "go along" with a certain program or work at that particular time. Just because the elders rejected some idea of the preacher doesn't mean they have rejected the truth! A preacher who feels so insecure when his ideas are rejected that he is ready to move will probably help greatly to finance some moving company! However, the elders should not feel that they are threatened because the preacher encourages some particular work.

A question that is pertinent to the work of elders and the preacher is, "Should the preacher attend the meeting of the elders?" The preacher and the elders must work closely together. Consequently, there must be constant communication between the two. If the preacher is "to take the ball and run with it," he must know the game plan. This being true, there will be many meetings between the elders and the preacher. The preacher, because of his knowledge and training in the Word of God, can offer recommendations which can be of great help to the elders. Does this mean, however, that elders will never meet without the preacher? There are times that the preacher should not be in the elders' meetings. It may be the case that some member has asked to meet with the elders to discuss a private matter, or the elders may simply be discussing something that in no way in-

volves the preacher. The preacher should not feel dejected or threatened by such.

The elders should make sure that the preacher is adequately supported. The preacher often has expenses that other members do not. He is considered self-employed by the I.R.S. and must pay all his social security. He will put more miles on his car than the average member. He is expected to dress nicely, which is, of course, another added expense. He may attend various lectureships where he gains valuable knowledge of God's Word in a particular area. Added to these necessities, is the normal cost of living (insurance, housing, groceries, etc.). A preacher that gets adequate support and yearly pay raises will know that he is appreciated. Paul wrote, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14).

A way to help ensure a good relationship between the elders and the preacher is to have a good start, which includes a work agreement at the beginning of his work. Such would include what his duties are and are not, his salary, days off, vacation, lectureships, gospel meetings he may hold, and a ninety-day work agreement. The elders (and members) need to understand if a preacher is "let go," that he cannot, in most cases, find another congregation in a couple of weeks. The ninety-day work agreement protects both the preacher and the church. Even if for some reason the preacher isn't allowed back into the pulpit, he and his family should not be "cast out into the street."

### CONCLUSION

Many church problems can be avoided if the leaders of the congregation work together in wisdom and in love. Although there are definite and different roles for the elders, deacons, and preachers, all should work together as a team. God, in His infinite wisdom, established the church of Christ with its elders, deacons, and preachers.

May each respect the roles of others and work together for the greatest cause that ever existed. "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21).

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>James D. Cox, ...*With The Bishops And The Deacons* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publications, 1976), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Cleon Lyles, *Bigger Men For Better Churches* (Little Rock, AR: Cleon Lyles, 1971), pp. 85-86.

<sup>3</sup>This list for the deacons was prepared by John Faught, one of the elders of the Coldwater Church of Christ, Coldwater, MS.

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# ELDERSHIP AND OLD TESTAMENT CONCEPTS

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## INTRODUCTION

In the literature of the movement to restore primitive New Testament Christianity, there has been manifested a particular interest in the work of the eldership in the local congregation. The classic works by J. W. McGarvey, *The Eldership*, and G. C. Brewer, *The Model Church*, provided well-reasoned and practical advice concerning the nature and function of the eldership. Since the publication of these two texts, many other books, as well as countless articles, have been penned regarding the various aspects of the work of elders in the Lord's church.

The purpose of this lecture is to provide a scriptural framework for understanding the idea of authority, as it pertains to the concept of an eldership. Today, it seems as never before, there exists much confusion as to the authority of elders. This is, no doubt, due to the various books and articles which have been written wherein a deliberate departure has been made from the biblical pattern. In addition, many today have sought to reinterpret Scripture concerning the eldership so as to negate any authority which an eldership manifests in the workings of the local church.

## DISCUSSION OF LEADERSHIP

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, wise observers in the church began to raise the specter of a church-wide leadership crisis. A few articles appeared in various papers discussing this theme, and related comments regarding a lack of direction in leadership at the local congregational level were made at lectureships. By and large, however, this crisis was met with silence. We were so focused upon the issues of the day that it took a while to comprehend the reason for such a departure among God's people. While many were looking intently at various issues which were plaguing the church at that time, others were beginning to notice an overall crisis in congregational leadership which allowed such doctrinal departures in surprising numbers. As such, the various heresies which the church continues to face from without and within are but the symptoms of a greater problem, a disease, an infectious disease which has spread from congregation to congregation like a potent virus. In 1977, the late Andrew Connally preached a powerful sermon wherein he stated that the Lord's church was facing a grave crisis—a crisis of leadership. Almost ten years later, in 1986, brother Connally wrote, in reviewing Goebel Music's book *Efficient Leadership in the Church*, "I have just finished reading the book...It makes me afraid! The examination of this material is frightening, for it shows how far leadership is from the Bible in most of our congregations." Others were already echoing the same sentiments. Indeed, what many were calling a present reality then, is now recognized by most concerned brethren, as a true crisis among us, a leadership crisis.

While leadership styles vary in secular organizations, God has clearly outlined a style of spiritual leadership which should characterize each local New Testament congregation of the Lord's church. The leadership of each local, autonomous congregation is vested in the local eldership. Yet, the function of the eldership is more than mere management of congregational business. It demands leadership, and leadership is not simply management! Leadership demands courage. It requires spiritual vision. It demands that God's goals be achieved. The church needs true leaders, visionary leaders!

## DEFINITIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Various Hebrew words are found in the Old Testament which relate in a powerful way to a proper understanding of the leadership which God requires. At this point I would urge every elder, preacher, and member to obtain a copy of Goebel Music's book entitled: *Efficient Leadership in the Church*. The following Old Testament terms for leadership are quoted freely from brother Music's work.

1. **The Concept Of A Watchman.** In Isaiah 62:6 we have, "I have set watchmen (Hebrew, *shamar*, to observe, to watch, to take heed) upon thy walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that are Jehovah's remembrancers, take ye no rest." This word is used about seven times. In II Samuel 18:24-27, we have the Hebrew word *tsaphah* as meaning "to look out, to watch." In Jeremiah 6:16-17, we hear, "Thus saith Jehovah, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein,...And I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet (Hebrew, *shophar*); but they said, We will not hearken." I suppose that one of the greatest of passages for this concept is found in Ezekiel 33:

*"Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and set him for their watchman (Hebrew, tsaphah);... But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned, and the sword come, and take any person from among them; he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. So thou, son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me..." (verses 2, 6, 7).*

In the New Testament we find "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls,..." (Hebrews 13:17). The Greek word here is *agrupneo*, to watch, keep guard, be wakeful. This word is found four times and is translated "watch" each time (cf. Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36; Ephesians 6:18). In Acts 20:28-31, we find "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock,...Wherefore watch ye,..." Here the Greek word is *grogoreo* and means "to keep awake, to watch, and so take heed lest through carelessness some great calamity suddenly overtake one."<sup>1</sup>

Watching must have been coeval with danger, and danger arose as soon as man became the enemy of man. A watchman was a sentinel on the city walls (Isaiah 62:6; Psalms 127:1; etc.). This goes back to the early period of Hebrew and Egyptian history. At the time of the Exodus (Exodus 14:24), the night had been divided into different watches. In the days of the Judges (7:19), we find the "middle watch" (Luke 12:38). At a later period, Isaiah plainly intimates that there was a "watchtower" in Jerusalem (21:5-6). Their post was at the gate (II Samuel 18:24; II Kings 9:17; Proverbs 8:34), where they gave signals and information, either by their voice or by the aid of a

trumpet (Jeremiah 6:17; Ezekiel 33:6). At night they were accustomed to perambulating the city (Song of Solomon 3:3; 5:7). Now, in the New Testament we find the second, third, and fourth watch mentioned (Luke 12:38; Matthew 14:25), and we have the term “vigilance” or “keep vigilant.” Four watches of three hours each: evening, midnight, cock crowing, and morning (Mark 13:35). Whether in the Hebrew or in the Greek, the Old Testament or the New Testament, we have a great concept in the idea of the word “watchman.”<sup>2</sup>

2. **The Concept Of A Shepherd.** This, perhaps, is a more familiar thought to us, however, it might be that we have never thought of the beautiful and prevailing Old Testament characteristics of a shepherd. There is simply no passage like that of Ezekiel 34:

*“And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the **shepherds** (Hebrew, **raab**, to tend, or feed sheep) of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, even to the **shepherds**, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Woe unto the **shepherds** of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the **shepherds** feed the sheep? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill the fatlings; but ye feed not the sheep. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought back that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigor have ye ruled over them. And they were scattered, because there was no **shepherd**; and they became food to all the beasts of the field, and were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my sheep were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and there was none that did search or seek after them.*

*Therefore, ye **shepherds**, hear the word of Jehovah: As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, surely forasmuch as my sheep became a prey, and my sheep became food to all the beasts of the field, because there was no **shepherd**, neither did my **shepherds** search for my sheep, but the **shepherds** fed themselves, and fed not my sheep; therefore, ye **shepherds**, hear the word of Jehovah: Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against the **shepherds**; and **I will require my sheep at their hand**, and cause them to cease from feeding the sheep; neither shall the **shepherds** feed themselves any more; and I will deliver my sheep from their mouth, that they may not be food for them” (verses 1-10, emp. GM).<sup>3</sup>*

There is a good reason for preferring the term “shepherd” over the term “pastor.” Anyone who knows the abuse by sectarian usage would agree to this fact. “Pastor” is from the Latin and “shepherd” is from the Anglo-Saxon. In the common jargon of today, “pastor” refers to the settled or local preacher (in denominationalism), but, of course, this cannot be so scripturally. An elder must be a true shepherd to the flock. He must learn to rule, guide, protect, and to be a companion to the flock. Wrapped up in *poimen* and *poimaino* (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2; I Timothy 3:4-5) we find a number of thoughts. In John 10 we have the great example of what it means to be a shepherd and not a “hireling.” If John 10 describes God’s feelings, then

God despises hirelings! The following is a MUST when we talk of a good shepherd, God's shepherd:

- a. **He Knows Them** (John 10:3, 27). He knows their personality, by ability, by weakness, by needs, and by name he knows them. Truly, "he takes heed unto the flock" (Acts 20:28).
- b. **He Is Faithful To The Flock** (John 10:27; Zechariah 11:17). He takes heed, he is steadfast, keeps qualified, and corrects his own faults, as David did his (Psalms 51). He heeds his conduct at home, work, play, worship, and in his thinking.
- c. **He Feeds The Sheep** (Jeremiah 3:15; Ezekiel 34:14; Isaiah 40:11). "Feed" and "tend" are from the same word, *poimaino* (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2; I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:9; John 21:16). He sees whether the doctrine is true or false (Ephesians 4:11-14; Acts 15:22-31; 16:4-5). He teaches the truth to others (I Timothy 3:1-2), exhorts in sound doctrine (Titus 1:7-9), convicts the gain-sayers and even preaches (I Timothy 5:17-18, better to have full time elders for some real pastoral work than assistant men in 'ministerial' work), and he speaks the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). We perhaps need to remember that "feeding" is only a small part of his work (Acts 20:28-31; note Jeremiah 23:1-4, which, of course, may be a little weak in English).
- d. **He Leads The Sheep** (John 10:1-5). He does this by being an example (I Peter 5:2-3), be it in recreation, business (honest), family life, social life, worship, service, speech, personal deportment, and he should be the best example. Special decorum must be his (I Peter 5:3, Greek, *tupos*, example), as the word means "the pattern in conformity to which a thing must be made." This is an essential element in the manner of executing their official duties. It is one of the specifications of the manner of taking the oversight. Their lives must be worthy of imitation (Hebrews 13:7; John 10:4), as he "leads," goes before them. We bring into play just here his "blameless reputation" (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7) and note the "example" found in such passages as I Timothy 4:12; Philippians 3:17; II Thessalonians 3:6-15; I Thessalonians 1:6-7; Titus 2:6-8.
  - \* If an elder knows these things and after carefully searching into his own life, finds that he is not, in some good degree, setting the example herein described, he should at once amend his ways or resign his position.
- e. **He Provides For the Sheep** (Psalms 23:1ff). He doctors the sick and the needy (cf. Acts 11:27-30; James 5:14-15), restores the lost sheep (Galatians 6:1-2; Luke 15:3-5; James 5:19-20), and comforts the weak and sad sheep in times of sickness and death, thereby ministering to all the sheep (Ephesians 4:11-12). Yea, even in family crises.

- f. **He Protects The Sheep** (John 10:27-30; Psalms 23:5). He does this work in two ways: (1) he watches (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:29-31), and (2) he guards (John 10:27-30). He is concerned about foes “without” and “within” (false teachers and schismatics). Elders are guardians and as such guard against worldliness, lukewarmness, divisions, etc.
- g. **He Unites The Sheep** (Hebrews 13:20f; I Peter 2:25; John 10:16). He sees that God’s word and it alone is taught. A man is hired to build up, not tear down (II Corinthians 13:10). This man is impartial, he refuses to gossip, gets along with the members and tries to perfect the saints.<sup>4</sup>

3. **The Concept Of Elder.** This word comes from the Hebrew *zaqen* and is used: (1) of older men or heads of families in Israel who exercised a patriarchal government over their posterity (Exodus 4:29; 19:7; note also Numbers 11:6; Deuteronomy 27:1), (2) members of the Sanhedrin, consisting of chief priests, elders and scribes, learned in Jewish law (Matthew 16:21; 26:47), (3) those who managed public affairs in the various cities (Luke 7:3), (4) among the Gentiles, rank or positions of responsibility (Genesis 50:7; Numbers 22:7), and (5) the word “elder” means older (Luke 15:25) or the eldest (John 8:9). It could refer to a person advanced in life (Acts 2:17). Also in Hebrews 11:2 the “elders” are the forefathers in Israel.<sup>5</sup>

4. **The Concept Of Ruler.** The thought found in “oversership” is that of ruling. It means to set or place over, to be over, superintend, to preside over. There are two words so translated from the Greek (1) *proistamenos*, to rule (Romans 12:8), are over you (I Thessalonians 5:12) and rule well (I Timothy 5:17; [sic] (2) *hegoumenoi*, to lead, to rule, to go before, be a leader, to command, to have authority over, controlling the counsel (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24). The term “over” is used in I Thessalonians 5:12 and Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24.<sup>6</sup>

5. **The Concept Of Overseer.** The Hebrew word we employ here is *paqad*, and means “to make or be inspected,” “to be overlooked,” that is, “inspected” (cf. Genesis 39:4-5; Nehemiah 11:9; II Chronicles 31:13). The Greek word is *episkope* and had for a primary meaning, “to look upon.” In usage it conveys the idea of “looking upon with a view to inspection or control.” The noun, therefore, means “oversight.” Because visitation is often done for the purpose of “inspection,” it is so translated in Luke 19:44; Isaiah 10:3 (LXX). The masculine noun, *episkopos*, is the man who performs the act designated by *episcopeo* (overseer). The primary sense is not that used of the title of an elder, but the secondary, or acquired sense is.<sup>7</sup>

6. **The Concept Of Steward.** The Hebrew expression *haish asher alis* “the man who is over” and is so used in Genesis 43:19. The Hebrew expression *asher al bayith* is “who is over a house” (Genesis 44:4).

In New Testament Greek we have the word *oikonomos*, and it is translated as “steward” in Titus 1:7 and informs us that an elder is a person who

is entrusted with the goods of another, as that is the very meaning of the term.<sup>8</sup>

7. **The Concept Of Teacher.** The Hebrew word *lamad* is often employed as “to teach,” “teacher,” or “to instruct” (Psalms 119:99; Deuteronomy 4:10; Ezra 7:10).

The Greek word is *didaskalos* and is used some 58 times and this is the word used in Ephesians 4:11 (*poimenas kai didaskalous*), as pastors and shepherds. Since it does not have the “article,” it may refer to the same group, but not necessarily so.

This is a qualification as found in I Timothy 3:2 (*didaktikon*) and refers to one who is “apt and skillful in teaching.” This qualification refers to one who is capable of instructing, publicly and privately. He must know the truth (Acts 20:28), and he must be able to, by sound doctrine, teaching, both exhort and convict the gainsayers (Titus 1:9). Being able to teach necessarily implies the “duty” of teaching. One might be a “teacher” and not a “pastor,” “shepherd,” but one cannot be a pastor, shepherd, without being a teacher!<sup>9</sup>

## DEDICATION TO LEADERSHIP

### Joshua in the Old Testament

The book of Joshua reveals how God brought His chosen nation into the land which He had promised to the Sethite patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The book of Joshua also portrays the various progressive stages whereby Israel entered, conquered, and possessed the promised land. One of the great themes of the book of Joshua is that victory comes through an active and obedient faith toward God and His Word rather than through human ingenuity or military prowess.

Joshua, as a leader, is one of the great religious personalities of Israel’s history. His life is depicted as one of boundless trust in God, and his childlike reliance upon the providence of the Lord blends together to make Joshua a wonderful example of faith.

In the opening chapter of the book of Joshua, four principles of living are given by the Lord. These four truths provided the necessary foundation which allowed Joshua to accomplish his mission to bring the nation of Israel into the promised land, and these four principles need to become ingrained in the life of every obedient child of God.

In the opening chapter the Lord, by direct revelation, gives four charges to Joshua. The first of these and each subsequent admonition begins with “be strong” and “of good courage.” In the Hebrew language, the word “strong (*hazaq*) means: “to become strong; to

strengthen; to prevail; to act in a strong manner.” The related term “courage” (*'amass*) means: “to be stout; to be alert; to be bold; to be solid.”

### **The Strength and Courage of Obedience (1:7)**

Second, God told Joshua “only be strong and very courageous, to observe to do according to all the law.” Here, the Lord stresses the strength and courage of obedience. Indeed, our obedience to God requires true strength of conviction and the courage of genuine commitment as we seek to faithfully live for Him. In fact, Jesus taught that the cost of discipleship would be a high price, which the believer must pay (Mat. 10:19-22; 10:34-39; 16:24-26; John 15:17-20). This aspect of God’s command to Joshua centers upon complete faithfulness to the Word. As we reflect upon God’s charge to Joshua may we ask: “Are we manifesting the strength and courage of obedience in our daily lives?”

### **The Strength and Courage of Dependence (1:9)**

Third, the Lord charged Joshua: “Be strong and of good courage; be not affrighted, neither be thou dismayed: for Jehovah thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” Here, Joshua was told that as long as he remained faithful, the Lord would be with him. He was to have a genuine dependence upon God. Indeed, such a complete dependence upon God is difficult for many people; yet, God requires such. Today, those who follow Jesus Christ are given certain promises as we come to depend upon Him through obedient faith (Mat. 6:33; Mark 10:29-31; Mat. 5:10-12). May we, too, have the strength and courage to be totally dependent upon God’s providential watchcare!

### **The Strength and Courage of Loyalty (1:18)**

Finally, Joshua is encouraged to have the strength and courage of loyalty to God. Joshua was told that spiritual rebellion toward God would not be tolerated. Indeed, the New Testament teaches that our loyalty to God and to the Bible (Christ’s Word—John 12:48-50) will determine our eternal destiny. Further, we learn that the cost of rebellion toward Christ and His church will result in the greatest loss—the forfeiture of our very soul (2 John 9-11; Gal. 5:19-21). May we have the strength and courage of loyalty to God!

## **DEPARTURE FROM LEADERSHIP**

### **Paul in the New Testament**

One of the clearest passages dealing with the authority of the eldership is found in Acts 20:17-32. Here, Paul describes the scope and sphere of the work of the eldership as God's select leaders in the church. This work, according to Paul, involves the following areas of activity. First, Paul describes the work of the eldership and the local preacher. Second, Paul discusses the responsibility of the eldership, as leaders, to the local church. Third, Paul relates the function of the eldership, as leaders, to guard itself and the congregation against false teachers and false doctrine.

As one studies the eldership from Acts 20:17-32, one thing becomes clear. The eldership possesses inherent divine authority. If no such leadership authority existed, then Paul's discourse in Acts 20:17-32 would be meaningless. However, such is not the case. His discourse is full of rich meaning—especially for those who desire to better understand the authority of the eldership.

Second, as one studies this rich context of Scripture, one sees that the elders, as God's leadership, must also have a genuine burden for those souls which are lost without the Gospel. In order to be willing to preach the whole counsel of God, and in order to lead God's people effectively, each elder must have this urgent desire to reach those outside of the Lord's church with the objective Truth of Jesus Christ. Such a burden is to be a source of great evangelistic motivation for the entire congregation (Rom. 1:14-15).

As we examine the important topic of the authority and leadership of elders, as it relates to the work of the local church, we shall now focus upon the teaching of the apostle Paul to the Ephesian elders, as found in Acts 20:17-32. In this passage, the apostle Paul met with the elders from the church at Ephesus in the town of Miletus. This town was already famous for having been the birthplace of Thales, who was the founder of the first Grecian philosophical academy. In Miletus, Paul met with the Ephesian elders in order to review their past work together, as well as to issue a warning to them concerning things that were an imminent danger to the church. In this passage of Scripture, Paul sets forth clearly his understanding of the authority and leadership of the eldership in the local congregation. His own concept of authority was forged by a fidelity to God's Word, as well as by years

of dedicated labor in the service of God. Indeed, by a careful study of Paul's inspired analysis of his labor in the kingdom, as recorded in Acts 20:17-32, we will be helped to understand the divine qualities of leadership which God has vested in the eldership.

### **The Eldership and Paul's Purity—Acts 20:25-27**

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God.

The apostle Paul relates to the elders from Ephesus that this would be their last face-to-face encounter together. These were men who were close in friendship and fellowship. Paul had converted them, as he implies by stating: "I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom," (v. 25). As such, they knew well his purity of motive for preaching the Gospel. In fact, before one can preach the whole counsel of God, one must have a pure motive for preaching; else the "whole counsel" of God will not be preached. It was because of Paul's purity of motive in preaching that his sermon content was spiritually balanced. He leaned neither to the right (radicalism), nor to the left (liberalism). Neither did Paul seek to gain the approval of men by his sermon content (cf., Gal. 1:10-12). Indeed, those who endeavor to preach the whole counsel of God are not interested in personal gain nor political favor. Therefore, Paul could truthfully say that he was "pure from the blood of all men" (v. 26), as he had preached the Gospel in its fullness. This is the intended purpose of his statement in verse 27, "For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God." A godly eldership will demand such balanced preaching. True and effective leadership will see that this goal is accomplished.

### **The Eldership and Paul's Prophecy—Acts 20:28-31**

Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears.

The prophecy of Paul as contained in verses 28-31 is important as he serves to warn the eldership of the Ephesian church of the coming apostasy. **First**, there is the prophetic warning to "take heed unto your-

selves” which denotes personal responsibility. **Second**, there is the prophetic warning to take heed “to all the flock,” which denotes collective responsibility. **Third**, there is the prophetic warning “to feed the church of the Lord,” which denotes leadership responsibility.

Paul then prophesies that from among the church there would arise men who would act as wolves in sheep’s clothing (cf., Mat. 7:15-20). Three areas of concern are noted by Paul in verse 30 regarding these false teachers. **First**, they would arise from the eldership. In fact, historians of the development of the early church correctly observed that the digression which led many congregations astray began within the eldership. **Second**, these false teachers would knowingly corrupt and twist the Word of God (cf., Gal. 1:6-12). **Third**, the goal of such false teachers was to “draw away the disciples” after themselves. In essence, they desired to divide and conquer the church.

In verse 31, Paul admonished the Ephesian elders to “watch ye” in order to prevent such men from ruining the local congregation. Indeed, godly elders who desire to “feed the church” with the whole counsel of God will recognize their divine duty to protect the flock over which they have charge. There are now some in the church who desire to minimize the authority of the local eldership.

**First**, some contend that elders possess no authority other than their own personal example. Such brethren appeal to First Peter 5:3 to help convince others along this line. Yet, such a shallow view is false for several reasons. This theory is governed by pure subjectivism. How far does such a contrived authority extend? Evidently not far, according to some brethren. Also, a proper exegesis of First Peter 5:3 is not complete without the inclusion of verse two, which commands that the elders “feed” (or tend) the flock, and that the elders take the “oversight” of the flock. Such commands as feeding, tending, and taking the oversight of the flock imply authority to so act!

**Second**, such brethren put forth the notion that elders have no more authority than anyone else in the church and that their decisions must be authorized by a consensus of the congregation. Such a view is wrong, however, as it places the eldership at the mercy of the congregation. As Robert R. Taylor has well noted, “The elders become the overseen and not the overseers!”

**Third**, passages such as Matthew 20:25-28 and 28:18 are referred to by various brethren who would seek to minimize the authority of

elders. Yet, these verses are taken out of context and misapplied in order to sustain such meaning. God's delegated authority to elders remains intact.

**Fourth**, some brethren have put forth the curious argument that the Greek word *exousia* (authority) is not used in connection with the eldership. However, neither is this word used in connection with parents, but who among us would deny the existence of parental authority? In fact, such Greek words as *episkopos*, *poimen*, *poimaino*, *noutheteo*, etc., do imply authority to the eldership. In this regard, Bobby Duncan, in an editorial in *Words of Truth* (July 21, 1978) makes the following observations:

In the second place, if division comes over the matter under consideration in this article, it will not be the responsibility of those of us who insist that elders should be obeyed. Not only is this the clear command of Hebrews 13:17, but it is also the position our brethren have held and respected down through the years. Some now taking the position that elders do not have any decision-making authority have in times past approached elderships for the express purpose of getting them to make decisions about certain matters.

In the third place, the differences among us over the authority of elders is not merely a matter of semantics. Too much has been written too plainly for it all to be passed off as a mere play on words. There are some of us who are naive enough to believe that "rule" means rule and "obey" means obey; but others deny that elders are to rule and the rest of us are to obey. To argue that the Bible does not use the expression "authority of elders" reminds us of statements we have heard made by those who opposed orphan homes and Sunday schools. They argued that these were unscriptural because they were not specifically mentioned in the Bible.

Finally, but not of least importance, is the fact that the absence of any passage using the Greek word **exousia** in connection with the elders does not argue or prove that elders have no authority, or that members have no obligation to obey them. Careful reflection will show this to be true. Please note: "The observation which strikes one strongest from this survey of **exousia** and 'authority' is that though the nouns and verbs for 'authority' are used for God, the devil, Jesus, the earthly rulers, the apostles, and evangelists, and even for ordinary Christians, they are never once used in connection with either the discharge of the function of... a parent toward his child or the attitude the child is to have toward his parents. Now, who would say that parents do not have authority over their children, or that children are not obligated to respect the authority of their parents?"

The Bible clearly teaches, the absence of the Greek word **exousia** notwithstanding, that a man is to **rule** his own house (1 Timothy 3:5), and that elders are to **rule** the church (Hebrews 13:17). It also teaches that children

are to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1), and that the church is to obey the elders (Hebrews 13:17).

### **The Eldership and Paul's Plea—Acts 20:32**

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Finally, Paul makes a strong plea to the Ephesian elders as he commended them to God and to the Word of God. Paul knew that it is essential for such leaders to be in a right relationship with God and that such comes by living in accordance with the Word of God (John 8:31-32; 2 John 9-11). When a child of God lives according to the will of God, two results are forthcoming. **First**, the child of God will be built up, edified, and strengthened. **Second**, such a life gains the eternal inheritance of Heaven. However, one must understand these blessings in light of the larger purpose—preaching the whole counsel of God. It is in this context that there should be no confusion as to the authority of elders in the local church. Elders do not have the right to legislate for God in matters of doctrine but they have been given the authority to see that the local congregation engages in its scriptural and necessary work. To this end their authority as overseers of the flock of God is important and should not be minimized.

### **CONCLUSION**

May every child of God, every elder, deacon, gospel preacher, and teacher of the sacred Gospel be vigilant in his desire to first live the whole counsel of God and then to teach it to others. By so doing, the army of Christ will be unified in local congregations under qualified elders and edified by fidelity to God's Word, and the world will be evangelized with the saving message of Jesus Christ.

### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Goebel Music, *The Faith Demands Efficient Leadership In The Church* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1986), pp. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-34.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-40.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.48.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.49.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

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# ELDERS AS WATCHMEN

*Joel Wheeler*



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## INTRODUCTION

The subject that has been assigned to me is “Elders As Watchmen.” Every member of the Lord’s church must recognize that men who serve as elders have the greatest responsibility of any person on the earth. There should be no debate as to the degree of responsibility which has been entrusted to these faithful shepherds of God’s flock. It is divine instruction that declared the responsibility of these men. The inspired author wrote, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). There should be no question that God intended for the local church to have shepherds to watch over the flock for its protection.

Many individuals among us hold to the false notion that elders are merely examples to the flock and nothing more. These individuals would proclaim that if elders are more than simply examples, then would these men be lording over the flock (1 Pet. 5:3). In this passage, Peter is forbidding the **abuse** of authority and not the **proper use** of authority. The elders are commanded and have the authority to watch for the protection of the church to keep it from harm. If elders

are merely examples to the flock, then why would God have such an office (1 Tim. 3:1)? Why would the Holy Spirit instruct these men to “feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Pet. 5:2)? Elders are not to abuse the work, yet authority is delegated to them from God to care for the church. Those who dare hold to the notion that elders are merely examples to the flock have been influenced by secular humanism and self-will to the point of rejecting God’s blueprint for the church. God has laid a great and honorable responsibility to the overseers of the flock which no man should dare dispute. Neither man nor angel can undo the responsibility of the eldership as God’s watchmen with divine approval (Gal. 1:6-9). Each dedicated member of the Lord’s body must never view the work of the church and the eldership too lightly. Overseers of the Lord’s church in all congregations should know that they will be held accountable on the judgment day for the faithfulness of the church (Jam. 3:1).

At least six words, if not seven, refer to the same office and work in the New Testament church. *Episkopos*, which is translated “bishop” or “overseer,” *presbuteros*, translated “elder” or “presbyter,” and *poimen*, translated “shepherd” or “pastor,” all refer to the same office and work. *Bishop* or *overseer* gives reference to position in the church. “Obey them that have the rule over you” (Heb. 13:17). “Rule” certainly indicates there is a stable position that must be maintained for the protection and the safety of the church. *Presbyter* or *elder* indicates their maturity of spiritual experience and the age of a man.<sup>1</sup> *Pastor* or *shepherd* prescribes the duty of tender care and vigilant superintendence in which God expects them to perform.<sup>2</sup> Paul stated that a bishop is the steward of God. *Steward*, found in Titus 1:7, is defined as the “manager of household or of household affairs.”<sup>3</sup> There can be no doubt that qualified men who serve as elders are the stewards of God’s house which Paul stated is the church (1 Tim. 3:15).

There are several terms in the New Testament that would demand the elders to be the watchmen over the flock. In Paul’s address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, they were exhorted to take heed to themselves and unto the church. Paul knew of the great danger of false teachers and continued to warn elders day and night of those men who had the devouring disposition of wolves preying upon the weak and

the young (Acts 20:29). The apostle Paul admonished these faithful men to *watch* with all their strength (Acts 20:28-34). The admonition to *watch* means “to be sleepless, keep awake, to be attentive and ready.”<sup>4</sup> Each local congregation of the Lord’s church would do well to appoint men to the eldership that are capable of watching at all times for their souls. There are too many times local congregations appoint men as overseers of the flock only to have these men serve in name only. These overseers are required by God to “watch for the souls” of the entire flock. It is necessary to be on guard at all times in every facet of the Lord’s church for the safety of the flock.

### **ELDERS HAVE A DUTY TO WATCH FOR FALSE TEACHING**

It is with great intensity that the elders should watch for any sign of false teaching in the church. Paul instructed that the mouths of the unruly, vain talkers and deceivers must be stopped (Tit. 1:9-10). He also noted that false teachers subvert whole houses and teach things they ought not to teach (Tit. 1:11). A false teacher is extremely dangerous to the church because he undermines the very foundation of Christianity; he cannot be allowed a platform on which to speak. An eldership must be capable of defending the truth and stopping those who would destroy the church with error.

Our Lord and Savior warned that false prophets would appear as innocent sheep among the flock, but they were actually vicious wolves. He said, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mat. 7:15). A false prophet has a false message and therefore cannot be allowed in and among the flock. “Beware” should be the cause of great alarm among the flock. Jesus forewarned of the harmless appearance of false prophets and their message. Those that would devour the weak and the young do not wear signs saying, “Beware, I am a false teacher.” They do not announce in a public way that they intend to hurt the church with their damnable doctrine. It is noted that their appearance is very deceiving and is presented as though they were on some great mission from God. Elders, by definition, are men with years of experience in the Lord’s church and should recognize a false teacher when they speak. Many times, elders can recognize warning signs before these individuals begin to teach error. One may not be able to recognize a false teacher by appearance, but he can and must

know them by their speech. Paul emphasizes that the appearance of false prophets and false teachers can be very deceiving. He wrote “for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:14-15).

How much grief could the church be spared if elders are watching over the flock as was commanded by Paul? In years past it was not an uncommon thing for elders to stop a preacher in the middle of his sermon and correct any error that he was teaching. Elders are able to prevent false doctrines from getting a foundation started by keeping a watchful eye. In today’s society it is more popular to let error go unnoticed than to correct it. Certainly it is a sad commentary about the local church when elders overlook false teaching and forsake the responsibility of watching over the flock. It is necessary that those who teach error be identified by watchmen to prevent any false teacher from making inroads within the church. Paul wrote, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17).

There are many false doctrines that have infiltrated the church, especially within the last twenty years. Many congregations which were once sound in biblical teaching are now being overrun with liberalism and modernism. This modernism consist of “contemporary worship” and “new hermeneutics,” which was started because these false teachers were sly. They continue to bring in damnable heresy the same way. Every eldership in the local congregations must be alert to these false teachings and watch for the beginning signs of apostasy. A shepherd of the church who is not watchful as to the teachers who come from abroad is like the literal shepherd who sleeps until the wolf has entered the fold.<sup>5</sup>

### **ELDERS HAVE A DUTY TO WATCH FOR THE WEAK IN THE CHURCH**

It would be fair to say that all congregations of the Lord’s church have some weak members. They are weak spiritually in doctrine and weak in immoral resistance. Just as sheep have a tendency to wander away from the flock, weak members stray away from the church. Shepherds watch over the flock to keep them from wandering; so God has entrusted a watchful eye to the elders to keep watch over the

church.<sup>6</sup> The inspired writer spoke of a weak condition among the members of the church in Jerusalem which were wandering away from the truth. The apostle wrote, “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Heb. 5:12). It is obvious that these Christians were weak in faith and their understanding of Christ; they should have been stronger in the faith.

Many members, if not a majority of the Lord’s church, are weak in doctrine and in personal faith. There must be elders who are able to watch and warn of coming dangers, especially for the weak. Many times elders prevent problems occurring in the church that would cause the weak to stumble and fall. The elders are designed as a safety net to protect them. Paul wrote, “take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak” (1 Cor. 8:9). It seems that in the church at Corinth there were some who did not consider the new and weaker members. These stumbled at the action of others who ate meats offered to idols. Although an idol is nothing and meats offered to idols are nothing, some believed eating these meats was an act of worship to pagan idolatry.

Many times weaker members are affected by the actions of older members. A brother in Christ that harbors envy and bitterness becomes a stumbling block to the weak. A sister in the Lord that cannot keep a clean tongue in her mouth causes problems for the weaker Christian. Elders can prevent problems arising in the flock if they watch for changes of attitudes in every member. Oftentimes members grumble at the decisions of the elders, which then causes the weaker members to become disheartened and discouraged. Elders should be acquainted with each member well enough to know the needs of each person to advise and counsel, to encourage, or reprove and rebuke as the need may be. Medical doctors watch for the safety and health of their patients. Sometimes doctors will place patients who are easily susceptible to disease in reverse isolation to protect them. Elders are men who are alert and watchful for the protection of the weak in the flock. These men can use such an opportunity to teach and strengthen when the occasion arises. Elders should forewarn of dangers that may arise by keeping a watchful eye over those who are vulnerable.

### **ELDERS HAVE A DUTY TO WATCH FOR WOLVES AMONG THEMSELVES**

The apostle Paul wrote, “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). It is the duty of the elders to know the truth and to watch over the flock. Paul stated that false teachers would arise from among themselves and would draw away disciples. This principle has repeated itself over and over in the history of the church. It normally starts with men who want to have the preeminence in the church. Paul wrote stating that an elder must not be “selfwilled” (Tit. 1:7). The self-willed man seeks to have his own way; regardless of the law of God, the wishes of his fellow-elders, and the congregation.<sup>7</sup> An eldership must be watchful that one man does not elevate himself to be “The Bishop” in the church. Men throughout the years have exalted themselves above others to be “the head elder.” Diotrephes was such a man that did as he willed, even casting some out of the church (3 John 10). A. T. Robertson wrote, “Some forty years ago I wrote an article on Diotrephes for a denominational paper. The editor told me that twenty-five deacons stopped the paper to show their resentment against being personally attacked in the paper.”<sup>8</sup>

An eldership is required to work together with the same purpose, that is for the good of the church according to God’s Word. Difficulty arises when contention and self-will begins to be seen among the leaders. No eldership can effectively perform the responsibility of watchmen when distracted with contentions among themselves. The eldership is no place for distrust and suspicion. They are to be on guard for any one who would elevate themselves and do harm to the church. Good shepherds are ever watchful of problems that may arise even among the eldership. It is a responsibility that never seems to have any relief.

### **ELDERS HAVE A DUTY TO WATCH OVER THE WORK OF THE CHURCH**

One thing that elders never can forget is the true work of the church. Many people have their own ideas as to what God expects from the church. Jesus said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). The great mis-

sion of the church is to preach the gospel of Christ. Paul said the gospel “is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). The work of the church is not to build recreation centers, nor social clubs, but rather to take the gospel to the world. Elders must watch and not be caught up into the modern mind-set of the world. If some members would have it their way, they would persuade the eldership to spend millions of dollars of the Lord’s money on buildings and art work. They would erect to themselves monuments of beauty and things which are pleasing to the eye. Some congregations build recreational centers in the name of evangelism just to entice the world. Their idea of evangelism is a church softball league. Elders must be watchful and not be caught into the worldly mind-set of some brethren.

If elders of a congregation are spending more of the Lord’s money on buildings and social events than preaching the gospel, they need to evaluate their priorities. Too many of our own brethren believe that preaching the gospel is foolish (1 Cor. 1:21). God expects His watchmen to use the contribution wisely. The inspired author wrote, “The fruit of the righteous *is* a tree of life; and he that winneth souls *is* wise” (Pro. 11:30). There is nothing wiser elders can do than to send men to preach the gospel of Christ. If the gospel of Christ is not preached, the souls of men will be lost and the church will fade away in one generation. Watchful elders will keep the work of the church continuing.

Oftentimes a mission work falls into the wrong hands, and false doctrine is taught. Elders have a duty to watch over the mission works and not be supportive of any error taught. An eldership would be endorsing false teaching if it was sending funds to a known false teacher. Remember the words of the apostle:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

One cannot support a false teacher without supporting his doctrine. Sometimes missionary works go unchecked, and no one knows what is being taught. Often many assume that the work is going well and do not know if it is or not. Elders would be wise in sending others to report of the work in foreign fields to be sure that missionaries are

being responsible. Although elders do not rule over other works, they will give an account as to how they spent the Lord's money.

### **ELDERS HAVE A DUTY TO WATCH FOR THE DIET OF THE FLOCK**

Some congregations place the Bible class structure into the hands of the preacher, deacons, or others. Much is discussed in a Bible class which the elders do not know about. Many times teenage classes end up being "rap sessions," and the Bible is not discussed. Many classes discuss dancing, social drinking, drugs, and corrupt language, but they never consider what God requires of individuals. Elders would be wise to examine the Bible class literature and even sit in on some of the classes to evaluate the spiritual condition. Many books are chosen for class literature which teach doctrinal error. Often elders place others in charge of ordering class literature and do not examine the content of them.

Other problems that affect our young people are liberal youth rallies. Some so-called "youth rallies" include vocal bands which imitate the sounds of instrumental music, hand clapping, shouting, followed by some liberal brethren giving a "feel good" pep talk. Youth rallies are often held in the name of the church and offer no Bible teaching against sin. Our young people come away from these rallies feeling good but have no substance for true spiritual growth in Christ. Peter wrote, "But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Elders must watch for what is being fed to our young people, that they may properly grow into mature Christian men and women. Without the sincere milk of God's Word, Christians will starve spiritually.

Elders must even watch for the small children. Sometimes cradle roll classes are used for baby sitting services. The first words of an infant should be "God," "Jesus," "Bible," and other words relating to the church. Many nurseries are filled with "gab" sessions during the sermon on Sunday mornings and evenings. Often, the cry room is not used for training but playing and having fun during the assemblies. Elders should watch to make sure that the nursery is not abused for its intended purpose of training infants and toddlers to worship with reverence toward God and the church. The inspired author wrote "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Pro. 22:6). What our children learn when small will

affect them when they are older; therefore, it is necessary for them to be trained properly. Training begins at home: no elder, preacher, or Bible class teacher can have the same influence over children as do their parents. But, elders can watch for the spiritual safety of all the church providing them with the right kind of spiritual nourishment.

### **ELDERS HAVE A DUTY TO WATCH OVER THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS**

There is a large shortage of Bible class teachers in every congregation of the Lord's church. Many times new converts are given a class book and tossed into a room full of screaming children. Too many times they are left to teach the class for twenty years with no relief or rotation. This is usually the procedure because there is no one else to take the class. It is necessary that teachers have a proper foundation of Bible knowledge before being put in a class of young eager minds. Elders that watch for the growth of teachers will know those that are willing and capable of being an effective Bible teacher. The time that a teacher spends in study is an investment with our young people for the future. Wise elders will use experienced teachers to train others willing to teach. The best opportunity for our young Christian men and women is to help in a Bible class, which gives them experience in teaching. Paul wrote instructing the aged women to "teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Tit. 2:4-5). Older women can be excellent teachers through study and practical experience. Elders should oversee that the aged women teach the younger women how to be good mothers, wives, and Christian ladies.

### **ELDERS HAVE A DUTY TO WATCH IN VIEW OF ETERNITY**

It is one thing to watch over the church, and it is another to watch in view of eternity. God said to Ezekiel: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me" (Eze. 3:17). Just as God made Ezekiel a watchman over the house of Israel, he made elders watchmen over the "house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15). It is with greater intensity that all faithful elders should watch over the church. The salvation of souls often rest upon the sleepless watching of elders for

the church. The inspired instructor wrote: "For they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17). Elders sometimes are accused of being ignorant and "lording over the flock." They are often criticized and mistreated for tedious decisions made for the good of the congregation. Many times shepherds of the church are grieved because some member will not heed the warnings given. Oftentimes it is with great sadness that disciplinary action be taken against a brother living in sin. Many times family members will personally attack the eldership because of withdrawal of fellowship from a member. But one must realize that they are watching for the souls of the church in view of eternity.

### CONCLUSION

The work of an eldership is a never ending task for they must always be watching for the care of the church. Each faithful member of the Lord's church must realize the work of faithful elders is required by God's inspired Word. Shepherds of the flock will be held accountable as to how they watch for the souls of the church. On the great day of judgment, all will stand before Christ and receive His reward based upon word and deed (2 Cor. 5:10). James instructed, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (Jam. 3:1).

Elders are like watchmen on the wall of an ancient city. Watchmen were desperately needed for the protection and the safety of the people in the city. These watchmen of old were placed strategically high on the wall so they could see afar off. When they saw the enemy, they would have plenty of time for warning and preparation. Good elders can prevent problems and the devil from destroying the church by keeping a watchful eye. Yet, if they are asleep, the church is doomed for problems. The apostle Peter, being an elder in the church, warned of great danger. He said,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

There should be no question that Satan is out to destroy the church and the souls of men. There must be watchmen to guard from the destructive forces of evil. Elders are shepherds and they watch in-

tensely for any sign that would harm the church. In God's great wisdom to preserve and protect the church, He provides a means of security for the flock. After thoroughly studying the Scriptures, one cannot but help see the importance and tremendous value of faithful elders who are willing to watch for the church. May we honor and respect the watchmen of God's flock for they care for our souls.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), p. 351.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 839.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1087.

<sup>4</sup>James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance Greek Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>J. W. McGarvey, *New Commentary of Acts Of Apostles* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company), p. 192.

<sup>6</sup>J. W. McGarvey, *A Treatise On The Eldership* (1870; rpt. Murfreesboro, TN: Dehoff Publications, 1982), p. 34.

<sup>7</sup>*Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary*, Forty-Fourth Annual Volume (National, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1965), p. 150.

<sup>8</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 6:263.

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# ELDERS AND THE STEWARDSHIP OF SOULS

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## INTRODUCTION

The Lord designed that there would be leaders in His church because there would always be the sick, weak, and lame to take care of and to defend. Saints are vulnerable until they have time to grow, and leaders protect them and train them at the same time. Someone said, "It is better to train 10 people, than to do the work of 10 people, but it is harder." Another said, "It is a fine thing to have ability, but the ability to discover ability in others is the true test." Leadership is a great thing and not easy to learn. Some think leadership is managing others and putting one's palm on them. Usually that's foolish pride and not leadership. General Patton said, "Don't tell a man how to do a thing. Tell him what you want done, and he'll surprise you by his ingenuity."

A good leader doesn't care if others get credit, or know he is in charge. He is interested in inspiring the confidence of others in themselves. He is a cheerleader to their growth, their best supporter. A great deal can be accomplished in the church if one doesn't care who gets the credit. A wise leader understands others know more in their field than does he. Who ought to sing tenor? Obviously the man who

can sing tenor. A leader only tries to support him, not direct him, as long as the tenor stays within the rules. A leader knows better than to spur a willing horse or to suppose he knows the engineer's work better just because he is the president of the company.

Too, sometimes a role is less that of a boss or foreman but will embody even more so the features of a "steward." In the New Testament the common word for steward is not *epitropos* which has more the flavor of "guardian." It is the word *oikonomos*, which "denoted the manager of a household or estate."<sup>1</sup> The word *oikos* in Greek is simply the word for "house." In New Testament times a steward was often a slave. On *oikonomos* Thayer has: "The manager of a household...a steward, manager, superintendent."<sup>2</sup> The word is used of an elder in Titus 1:7. Arndt and Gingrich say it is used of one who is "the minister of a private position."<sup>3</sup> So the word can also be used of Christians in general (1 Pet. 4:10). Abbott-Smith says it is used of one whose work is "to manage, regulate, arrange."<sup>4</sup>

## BACKGROUND

We read:

In most civilizations authority has been vested in those who by reason of age or experience have been thought best qualified to rule. It is not surprising therefore that the leaders in many ancient communities have borne a title derived from a root meaning "old age." In this respect Hebrew "elder" (*zaqen*) stands side by side with the Homeric *gerontes*, the Spartan *prestys*, the Roman *senatus*, and the Arab *sheikh*.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly in the Bible it is true for there were elders in the house of Pharaoh during the time of Joseph (Gen. 50:7), and elders are mentioned from Egypt on for the Israelites. Moses performed signs in front of the elders of Israel (Exo. 4:29), and Israel served Jehovah all the days of the elders who knew Joshua (Jos. 24:31). Israel had elders of towns and cities (1 Sam. 16:4; 30:26), and they fit into certain purposes of the law and continued throughout Israel's history (Deu. 25:7; 29:10; 31:28; Ezra 5:5; Mat. 26:59).

These Scriptures show that men have always realized a need for leadership, and that some are more skillful or brave than others. Too, age seems to go further than almost anything in making wise decisions. We have such sayings as: "Young men for war; old men for counsel"; "Old people see further in the distance"; "If you would succeed quickly, ask three older people"; "With young men spar; with

old men listen”; “Old oxen plough straight”; and “When an old dog barks he warns.” So, we find such respect in the Bible: “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and thou shalt fear thy God: I am Jehovah” (Lev. 19:32). Peter says, “Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder” (1 Pet. 5:5).

### WORD STUDIES

Just to know where we stand and for future reference, let us do a few brief word studies. We will try to not be too technical.

**ELDER:** This is *presbuteros*, which refers to the office, but the word proceeds from the idea of “an old man, an elder.”<sup>6</sup>

**BISHOP:** *Episkopos* refers to the same office as above (Acts 20:17, 28). The word, again, is *episkopos*. *Epi* means “over,” and *skopeo* means to “look” or “watch.” This term “bishop” (in English) has the same meaning, but it “indicates the character of the work undertaken.”<sup>7</sup> According to First Peter 5:2, the bishop “exercises the oversight” or takes “the oversight,” of a flock, i.e., the congregation.

Regarding the elder or bishop’s work in oversight, the word translated “tend” or “feed” is often used (John 21:16; 1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28). The word *bosko* is not used which primarily means to “feed.” We are talking of the Greek word *poimaino*, which means “to act as a shepherd.”<sup>8</sup> It includes more than to give food, as important as that is because it is making sure the church has the Word of God (Acts 20:32). The bishops give spiritual care in every way; besides the Word of God being given, it may include discipline, and whatever it takes to restore brothers and sisters and see they are cared for.

### AUTHORITY OF ELDERS

The question arises: “Do elders have authority to govern the congregation, even in matters of judgment?” Yes, they do. Notice first Hebrews 13:17: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit *to them*: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this *were* unprofitable for you.” *Hegeomai* which means “to lead,” is translated “to rule” in Hebrews 13:7, 17, and 24. Some have misguidedly supposed that leaders such as elders only have “example” authority and “do not call the shots” in matters which concern the flock, especially in matters of judgment or opinion. It has always been my opinion that elders rule especially in matters of opinion. In matters of

truth they instruct, stop the mouths of gainsayers, and enforce Christ's laws in the church. This is their work. However, Thayer says *hegeomai* means "a. to go before; b. to be a leader; to rule, command; to have authority over."<sup>9</sup> The word can be used of a prince with regal powers as governors (Mat. 2:6); a viceroy or a governor as in Acts 7:10; of Joseph, or of a chief as in Luke 22:26; of kings and those who exercise authority among the Gentiles. How anyone believes they can strip elders of their authority by the use of that word is outside my understanding.

Another word used is *proistemi*. First Timothy 5:17 says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching." The word is used in regard of a local church, or a family. Thayer says that in First Timothy 5:17 it means "to be over, to superintend, preside over, [A.V. rule]"<sup>10</sup> In First Timothy 5:17, Arndt and Gingrich say it means to "be at the head (of), rule, direct...manage, conduct...of officials and administrators in the church."<sup>11</sup> Isn't that proof enough?

However, the word *poimaino*, which means to tend the flock, also shows authority to rule. For example, in Revelation 2:26-27 we find, "And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations: and he shall **rule** them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers." In Revelation 12:7 it is used of Jesus **ruling** the nations in like manner. We find the same word used of the **rule** of Jesus in Revelation 19:15. So it is difficult to establish that the word *poimaino*, when used of elders, is stripped of the flavor of "rule."

### ELDERS' STEWARDSHIP IS SEEN IN THEIR QUALIFICATIONS

We have seen that elders are stewards (Tit. 1:7). The flock will die from lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6); so an elder is to be "apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). Again *didaktikos* means the elder is skilled in teaching. To be a wise steward he must know the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). He knows the Word of God so well that it is said he holds to it (Tit. 1:9). Thus, he can exhort in healthy doctrine and convict those who speak against it (Tit. 1:9). This is part of his shepherding stewardship—to save souls, and to defend the flock. The word translated "convict" is not merely used to rebuke one whom an elder feels is wrong; it means more. It signifies "to convict, confute, refute, usually

with the suggestion of putting the convicted person to shame.”<sup>12</sup> It is to prove someone wrong, as an elder does to false teachers to the extent that he stops their mouths before they can overthrow houses (Tit. 1:11).

So, regarding elders being stewards of the flock and of our souls, what have we found? Through all time elders will be needed as they have been in every society in the past and as we have seen them in Bible times in various countries. Whether their stewardship is from the family, state, clan, or tribe, they guide, direct, and protect. Stewardship involves wise, skilled leadership, yet not lordship. Words we have studied have had the flavor of “guardian, manager, superintendent.” He is a minister of a position, and is to regulate and arrange. Age usually brings wisdom, and so an elder is to be honored for his age and white hair.

Regarding his authority to do so, our word studies have yielded such words as: “watch,” “oversight,” “tend,” “act as a shepherd,” “lead,” “rule,” “command,” “preside,” “to be over,” “be at head,” “direct,” “conduct,” “administer,” “teach,” “convict,” “confute,” and “stop mouths.” Such words regarding “rule” have been used of the rule of rulers such as Joseph in Egypt and Jesus the Christ. Now that the work of stewardship is understood and their authority to do so established, let us look more precisely in regard to what the work of stewardship may involve for bishops or elders.

### **WHAT THE WORK OF ELDERS IS NOT**

First, elders or bishops have no God-given authority over anything but the local congregation. Christ is the head of the universal church. Bishops control no central organization, no presidency, no board of directors (Phi. 1:1). They rule no mission congregation which they financially support.

Second, there has always been a problem (and it may be growing) that brethren and elders see the qualifications of an elder to be that of a successful businessman rather than a godly and spiritual Christian. It is as if elders are only a decision-making board of directors. This mindset usually sees the health of the church in terms of numerical count, finances or contribution, and a beautiful building. It is not a matter of truth, spirituality, conflict with evil, zeal, or holiness, but more a matter of busy work, social life, and keeping people happy.

Third, some elders consider that their work consists in supervising the preacher, secretary, or any on the “payroll.” Some elders want the preacher to do their own pastoring for them, report back, and then tell the preacher how they want it handled. The best relationship as handed down from long ago is let the elders “eld,” the deacons “deek,” and the preacher “preach.” Some elders, who know better than to “lord it over” the flock, “lord it over” the preacher, secretary, deacons, and even other elders, which is the abuse of authority which the Lord taught against more than once. It is true that an elder has the responsibility to watch and make sure sound doctrine is taught. It is also true that a preacher has the commandment to reprove an elder in the sight of all when an elder sins (1 Tim. 5:19-20). Hopefully he is not fired if he does it, but regardless, to please the Lord, that is part of the preacher’s charge. But no preacher ought to try to run the elders or submit to pressure to do the elders’ work. Too, no elder normally has a stewardship to try to direct and manage the preacher’s work. However, some preachers may need it. Yet, the only elders with expertise in the work of preaching are those who have successfully preached for years and retired probably due to a disability. Yet, some preachers think they are to direct elders and vice versa. Actually, they ought to be a team, supporting and upholding each other. They should never try to lower each other in the brethren’s eyes, but rather serve one another. It is a difficult thing to understand that a preacher is only to submit to elders as every other member of the flock is to submit and that he should be treated no differently than other Christians because an elder has the power to “fire” him.

Fourth, it is not the work of a preacher to visit the sick, the shut-ins, the weak, and those who need restoration. Some elders think so and act accordingly. That is primarily, however, the work and stewardship of elders **regarding souls** and secondly the task of all Christians. The preacher is no different than any other Christian in those matters. However, it is seldom true in any congregation that the preacher is not treated differently, and unfair demands are put on the preacher to “eld,” things that God did not put there. Elders as shepherds have a stewardship of the souls of their flock.

Fifth, it is not the work of a gospel preacher to be a “good mixer,” well liked in the community, or a men-pleaser. If he has that attitude, he will have sermons of pink tea, tidbits of philosophy, fluffy direc-

tions on how to feel good down in your heart, and other things from the world's trough. In the selection of a preacher, elders, as stewards, will look at spiritual qualifications. Else the preacher will tickle ears rather than prick hearts, promote fun and games rather than challenge brethren with denial, persecution, and suffering (which things are at the crux and core of Christianity). Elders as stewards help the evangelist resist such carnal temptations. They direct him and encourage him in the one needful thing (Luke 10:38-42).

### THE WORK OF ELDERS AS STEWARDS

Some of this is redundant, but repetition is the mother of learning.

First, we have seen that an eldership must exercise authority over the flock, and in some cases they must exercise authority over themselves. If I were Satan, I would try to make men-pleasing "pastors" out of preachers and then snatch away all authority from elders. We have seen that we are to "obey" elders (Heb. 13:17), and that they are to tend and rule the flock (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Tim. 5:17). True, they are not to abuse their authority and "lord it over" Christians in the congregation (1 Pet. 5:3), but a congregation is not a democracy. Elders are to "call the shots," not preachers, deacons, or the congregation.

Second, elders must take heed to themselves (Acts 20:28). Any elder is under the authority of the eldership. Too, there is never a time for them to cease to look inward individually and to grow and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor. 6:17-7:1). Part of their stewardship is to be an example to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3), and they cannot quit improving and trying to do that (Col. 1:21-22; Col. 3:1-4). They ought to be examples to each other, to the deacons, and the preacher.

Third, they have a stewardship given them to shepherd the flock. We saw *poimaino* means to act as a shepherd. This would include church discipline (2 The. 3:6), restoration of the lost, deciding on material assistance, and prayer (1 Tim. 3:5; 1 Pet. 5:2).

Fourth, we have already noticed that they are to protect the flock. How can they do this without the ability to hire and fire preachers, determine the qualifications of teachers and curriculum, and make decisions where they allow the young people to go? Certainly they cannot do it if they know not the Word.

Brethren, let us not be critical or judgmental, but let us sympathize with our elders when we read the following passage:

And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, even to the shepherds, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Woe unto the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the sheep? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill the fatlings; but ye feed not the sheep. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought back that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigor have ye ruled over them. And they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they became food to all the beasts of the field, and were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my sheep were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and there was none that did search or seek *after them* (Eze. 34:1-6).

Brethren, elders ought to receive our prayers daily. Their responsibility and burden is immense. They will answer to God now and in judgment for their stewardship. Truly, in every work there are those involved for the wrong motives. However, after thirty years of preaching, I have felt and seen close up that there are few elders in sound churches there for those reasons. If it is part of some elders' motivation, it is in minute numbers and rarely there at all. As with most preachers, elders, with the ability God gives them, are there in the work because of duty. They don't dwell on it much, and it is largely subconscious, but the ones who are wrongly motivated soon show their colors, never qualify, or are slowly weeded out.

They quit, let the church go liberal (or whatever pleases the flock), or will be dealt with when the Lord returns. I don't believe it will be a happy occasion or a pretty sight. In sound elderships, where liberal troublemakers and carnal or worldly persons are brutishly determined to have their fleshly and secular needs met, it is torture to be a godly elder. I have seen it almost regularly that they go through so much pain and agony that they have to encourage each other to stay in there. Why do not preachers think about encouraging them once in a while, support them, defend them, and serve as a lightening rod for them? Why don't brethren slap them on the back, speak up for them, realize the forces of evil are great, and so take their stand beside them? The prayers of godly men and women should rise daily and fill the heavens on behalf of these shepherds. We ought to take some of their load by visiting the sheep ourselves. We ought to help feed the flock. We ought to aid in strengthening the diseased, healing the sick, binding up

the broken, and bringing back that which is driven away, scattered, and become food for wolves. We should seek those who have wandered and search for those who are lost. Why? First, we, too, are our brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9). Second, love never faileth (1 Cor. 13:8). Third, we are actually exhorted as brethren to "admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all" (1 The. 5:14).

Brethren, godly, brave elders need all the support they can get—even when they make decisions on which we disagree or cannot understand. So their stewardship includes shepherding, which involves many things.

Fourth, the bishop must be "apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). This does not mean he is willing to teach if he were able. Nor does the context discuss teaching by singing or by example. *Didaktikos* has the flavor of being skilled in teaching. He may not be the best teacher in the brotherhood or have the delivery of a professional, but he must teach—even if it's just one on one or with a gainsayer. The whole Bible cries out that the emphasis is on content and on spiritual skill. The word used does not require that the bishop use the pulpit or that he be at the head of a class. However, we read, "And he gave some *to be* apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). In the original grammar of the verse "pastors" and "teachers" are linked together in such a way as to refer to the same person, i.e., the elder. He need not be a great businessman, but he needs be spiritual, a man of the book, and has a stewardship to save souls through teaching.

Fifth, he must be brave. How can he back a sound preacher if he would rather be liked by the brethren? How could he admonish if he were too timid? He is not merely to rebuke (*epitimao*), reprove (*elencho*), and teach (*didasko*), but also discipline.

I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators; not at all *meaning* with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world: but as it is, I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat. For what have I to do with judging them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Put away the wicked man from among yourselves (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us (2 The. 3:6).

And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed. And *yet* count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 The. 3:14-15).

There are several things we notice in the above passages. First, withdrawal of fellowship is commanded by God. It is to keep the church pure and to prevent sin from spreading (1 Cor. 5:6; 15:33). Second, we notice the command to withdraw fellowship is given to the whole church (“brethren”)—all the brethren. Those who refuse to do it are in violation of the command of God. Third, we know if shepherds are there, the church is to follow their lead as they rule. Church discipline is part of their stewardship from God. It is used by elders as a last resort to restore the lost and we need the whole congregation to act in concert to help elders in their stewardship to save souls. Then, when it works and a sinner is brought back to his senses, we must follow the elders’ lead in receiving the lost back with love and gentleness (2 Cor. 2:5-9; Gal. 6:1-2). All this is our part in helping the elders keep their stewardship in the saving of souls.

### WATCHMEN

The essence of a bishop, as any shepherd, is the stewardship to watch out for the safety of the flock. Paul puts it in words such as “take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock” (Acts 20:28). When elders take heed to themselves, it does not merely mean they test their own individual selves (2 Cor. 13:5); it also includes elders taking heed to the eldership, as is evidenced by Paul’s warning: “And from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). Then Paul says, “Wherefore watch ye” (Acts 20:31).

Sometimes, in going to a meeting, an elder has said to me of a particular issue or two, “We don’t have all these problems; so you don’t need to bring them up.” But, is that wise stewardship? Does one wait for the flu before he seeks a flu shot? Do not wise elders inoculate the brethren before false teaching hits them? I’ve seen elders criticized for going to lectureships where current issues are discussed. Brethren, there are things afoot in the brotherhood. We must be informed on issues, symptoms, and particular false teachers. The stew-

ardship of elders includes marking false teachers (Rom. 16:17) and alerting the flock to issues which will affect salvation and unity.

Also, being a preacher, I still want to say that elders in their stewardship of souls must watch the preacher. Is he interested in preaching truth, even to the point of jeopardizing his “job,” or does he seem to be a men-pleaser, more interested in getting a dedicated following? If the latter, with God’s help elders need to act with all speed to either straighten him out or invite him to leave. Time is rarely on the good steward’s side. A lot of mischief can be done in a small amount of time. Such a preacher cares not if he splits the church or makes enemies for an eldership. Like Absalom, day by day he ingratiates himself to brethren until, when he must be rooted out, it is with great loss of souls.

### CONCLUSION

What a grand and high work it is to serve the Lord as an elder, a steward of souls. Godly elders who are steadfast will surely be rewarded by suffering persecution for their efforts. Not all are so worthy (Rev. 3:4). As a tribute to the brave men who suffer so much, may we let God in the book of Daniel have the honor of the final word:

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever (Dan. 12:2-3).

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940) 4:1097.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 440.

<sup>3</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*(Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 562.

<sup>4</sup>G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1968), p. 313.

<sup>5</sup>J. B. Taylor, “Elder,” *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed., S.V.

<sup>6</sup>Vine, p. 360.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 130-131.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 427.

<sup>9</sup>Thayer, p. 276.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 539.

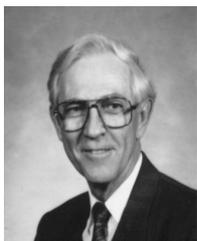
<sup>11</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, p. 713.

<sup>12</sup>Vine, p. 241.

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# ELDERS AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

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## INTRODUCTION

We shall discuss the above subject under two headings: “Church Discipline” and then “Elders” and church discipline.

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Church discipline is commanded. “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us” (2 The. 3:6). Even though this command is a difficult one, no Christian who sincerely wants to go to heaven is prejudiced against it—or for that matter any of God’s commands. Paul also wrote in First Corinthians 5:11: “But as it is, I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat.” We must obey all of God’s commands and all of His instructions whether the subject is giving, Christian living, discipline, or any other subject.

The Corinthian congregation was commanded to “put away the wicked man from among yourselves” (1 Cor. 5:13). Multitudes of

congregations and individuals either disregard or completely ignore the command to practice discipline, as if the command did not exist. A failure to practice discipline could conceivably cost us our souls, just as would disobedience to any other command of the Lord.

There was in the Corinthian Church the well known case of adultery. The church was shamed by their toleration of this sin. Paul wrote, "It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not even among the Gentiles, that one of you hath his father's wife" (1 Cor. 5:1). Not only are we commanded to discipline an adulterer, but also those who commit other sins which are specified in First Corinthians five and other places in the New Testament.

### GOD HAS ALWAYS PRACTICED DISCIPLINE

Our heavenly Father is a loving God, but He is also a God of severity. Paul wrote, "Behold then the goodness and severity of God: toward them that fell, severity; but toward thee, God's goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22). Not only does God punish the wicked, but He also uses discipline to cause others to fear and to refrain from wickedness. Under the law of Moses parents were to take the lead in disciplining "a stubborn and rebellious son" (Deu. 21:18-21), and "all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die" (Deu. 18:21). Another purpose of discipline was that "all Israel shall hear, and fear" (Deu. 18:21). Paul wrote in regard to the discipline of ungodly elders: "Against an elder receive not an accusation, except at *the mouth of* two or three witnesses. Them that sin reprove in the sight of all, that the rest also may be in fear" (1 Tim. 5:19-20).

Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, and God disciplined them (Gen. 2:17; 3:1-19). He drove them out of the garden, and excluded them from His fellowship. After Cain had murdered his brother, God drove him out into the land of Nod and placed a mark upon him (Gen. 4:10-16). God also destroyed the wicked people that populated the world during the time of Noah (Gen. 6:1-22; 1 Pet. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 2:5). God destroyed the wicked cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain, because they were wicked (Gen. 19:1-24; Jude 7). God killed Nadab and Abihu in the very act of their false worship (Lev. 10:1-2). Though God's law has changed (Heb. 10:9-10; Heb. 7:12), God's nature has not changed (Mal. 4:6). He

killed Ananias and Sapphira, members of the New Testament church. He did so because of their sins (Acts 5:1-14). As a result of this discipline: “great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things...And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:11-14). **Question:** Why was this discipline practiced, and why do we have a record of it? **Answer:** “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all *them that are* about him” (Psa. 89:7). This is also God’s purpose under the new covenant. “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12: 28-29). The punishment suffered by Ananias and Sapphira is but a glimpse of the awful punishment that God will visit upon the wicked at the judgment.

As has already been pointed out, sometimes God punished the wicked in a miraculous way, but that was not always the case. The wicked were often punished in the wilderness by the people (Num. 25:6-9). As already noted, a son who was a drunkard and rebellious and would not hearken unto his parents was to be stoned to death so that all Israel would “hear, and fear” (Deu. 21:18-21).

### **THE CHURCH IS TO WITHDRAW FROM THOSE WITHIN, NOT THOSE OUT OF THE CHURCH**

We cannot discipline those outside the church, but we must withdraw from “**every brother** that walketh **disorderly**” (2 The. 3:6). We must not try to root up the tares or “the children of the wicked *one*” (Mat. 13:30-39). Those that are without “**God judgeth.**” Paul writes that we are to judge them that are “within” and we are to, “put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor. 5:13).

The church should not only withdraw from a drunkard, or a fornicator, but also from those who are covetousness, railers, extortioners, and all “disorderly” persons (2 The. 3:6).

### **WHEN TO WITHDRAW**

There are some cases with which we should deal without delay. Paul wrote, “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Tit. 3:10-11). In dealing with weak members and those who realize that they have problems (but are will-

ing to endeavor to do better), we should be very patient (1 The. 5:14). We should have compassion on those who are ignorant and erring (Heb. 5:1-2). We are to reprove and rebuke them that are in error and sin (2 Tim. 4:2-3). In extreme cases, Paul instructs that drastic means be used. He wrote, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20).

The church cannot prosper when there is sin in the camp. "Sin *is* a reproach to any people" (Pro. 14:34). Furthermore, those who endorse sin in others are themselves guilty of sin (2 John 9-11). Each of us must not harbor sin in our own lives. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*" (Psa. 66:18). We must rebuke sin and try to restore those who are overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1; Jam. 5:19-20).

### **"ELDERS" ARE TO TAKE THE LEAD**

The entire congregation is commanded to "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly" (2 The. 3:6). However, the elders are the God-appointed bishops or overseers of the congregation (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1-6). The elders have the responsibility to investigate, and when they learn all the facts, and know that the report is true, they then should endeavor to restore the guilty brother. If they should fail, the good influence and action of the entire church should be enlisted in the effort to restore the erring.

When the time for the withdrawal arrives, it must be done "when ye are gathered together" (1 Cor. 5:4). It should be pointed out that the this withdrawal, as well as everything that we do, must be done according to the "golden rule." "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Mat. 7:12). If a capable surgeon is compelled to do surgery to remove a limb from the body, he would seek to be as gentle and considerate as possible. This should certainly be the case when duty demands that the church withdraw from an erring member.

### **WHAT IS THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH TOWARD THE ERRING?**

Sometimes I have heard it said, "The elders withdrew from the disorderly." No, that is not the entire truth. It is true that the elders need to announce the intention to withdraw from the erring. However, the entire church participates, not just the elders.

The announcement is one thing, but the actual disfellowshipping comes when all the faithful members of the church refuse to fellowship the erring. That includes the fact that no one is to keep company with the excluded brother or sister, nor to eat, or associate with him (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 The. 3:6).

Let us be kind to all men, even the disorderly. We are not to count the withdrawn members as enemies, but we are to love them and genuinely desire that they will repent, and thus be restored. Paul wrote, "And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed. And *yet* count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 The. 3:14-15).

We are not to withdraw from all who are imperfect, for none of us is perfect. We read, "There is no man that sinneth not" (1 Kin. 8:46). "For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecc. 7:20). Jesus said, "*there is* none good but one, *that is*, God" (Mat. 19:17). The apostle John said of himself and other Christians, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). With these Scriptures before us it would be foolish for us to set out to withdraw ourselves from all those who are in some way imperfect. In that case, none could do the withdrawing. The divine side of the church is perfect, but the human side of the church is as weak and imperfect as its members. The church of our Lord might be thought of from a figurative standpoint as a hospital to which the weak and frail, the wounded and bleeding, the sick and dying come for spiritual health and abundant life. "And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are in health have no need of a physician; but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). He also said, "I came that they may have life, and may have *it* abundantly" (John 10:10).

There are different types of people in the fellowship. Some are babes in Christ, and they need the time to grow (1 Pet. 2:2). These members are sincerely trying to live the Christian life. They need to be fed, nourished, and encouraged. These spiritual babies are happy in the Lord, and they are endeavoring to "abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9). These babies are not as mature as some who have been in the church for many years. The babies in the church need to be dealt with in tenderness and patience.

However, there are some in the fellowship of the church who are in known rebellion against God. They have deliberately turned their backs on the Lord and have gone back into sin. Jesus said some would “for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13). It is possible for one to go so far from the Lord and His truth that it is impossible to renew them unto repentance (Heb. 6:4-6). However, there are others who though they are willful sinners, and impenitent; nevertheless, they insist that they remain in fellowship with the church even though they let it be known that they do not love the Lord nor His church.

### **HOW GOD ENCOURAGES MEN TO OBEY HIM**

A plurality of motives and incentives move man to obey God. The greatest incentive to serve God is that characteristic called love (1 Cor. 13:13). His love for us as set out in the Bible causes us to love God (1 John 4:19). This love encourages obedience on our part (1 John 5:3; John 14:21).

The goodness of God and the love of Christ encourage us to obey God (John 3:16; Gal. 1:4; 2 Cor. 8:9). Paul wrote, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4).

We obey God in order to receive His blessings. Therefore, the “exceeding great promises” of God play a great part in causing many to serve the Lord (2 Pet. 1:4).

God also uses threats and warnings of the gospel in order to cause men to turn to Him. In this case fear plays an important role. “By the fear of the LORD *men* depart from evil” (Pro. 16:6). Man is so constituted that he does not want to be ignored, humiliated, and put to shame before his fellows. He does not want to be punished and made to suffer. God wants man to fear Him and turn from evil in order to escape the inevitable consequences of sin. Jeremiah wrote, “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from me” (Jer. 32:40). The withdrawal from the disorderly members tends to produce a wholesome fear and reverence toward God, and His church.

### **RESPONSIBILITY OF OTHER CONGREGATIONS**

Even Satan is not divided against himself (Mat. 12:25-26). Therefore, the excluded brother or sister cannot place his membership with

another congregation unless and until he repents. God would not have one congregation withdraw from an erring member, while another congregation takes him in—even though he has not repented. Therefore, when strangers come to a congregation claiming to be faithful, it may be that the elders should ask for a letter of commendation from the elders of the congregation from where they have been members (2 Cor. 3:1-3). Remember that the Jerusalem congregation would not receive Paul until Barnabas endorsed him (Acts 9:26-27).

### **A CHURCH CAN BE DISFELLOWSHIPED**

Each congregation of the Lord is free under Christ the great Head of the church. Churches of Christ are not tied together by any type of denominational or ecclesiastical organization. However, there is a fellowship among the congregations. One congregation is not to treat another faithful congregation as if it were a Catholic or Protestant congregation. Peter wrote, “Love the brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17). The brotherhood is larger than a local congregation. The Lord desires that there be unity among all Christians, and not only a local congregation (John 17:20-22). Therefore, if a congregation departs from the truth, and brings in mechanical instrumental music into the worship (or something equally unauthorized), no faithful congregation should fellowship it any more than it would a denominational church.

### **A BRIEF SUMMARY**

1. We are commanded to withdraw from the disorderly (2 The. 3:6). “Put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor. 5:13).
2. Withdrawal must be done by the authority of Christ, i.e., “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 5:4).
3. The withdrawal is to be a public withdrawal, “when ye are gathered together” (1 Cor. 5:4).
4. The purpose of withdrawal is “to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5).
5. Another purpose of withdrawal is to “purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump” (1 Cor. 5:7).

### **FALSE TEACHERS NOT TO BE FELLOWSHIPED**

We warned not to fellowship false teachers. Paul wrote,

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent (Rom. 16:17-18).

Paul also wrote, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). In some cases, the peace of the church depends upon withdrawing from factious people, and Paul informs us not to devote more than a second admonition to such men. “A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned” (Tit. 3:10-11). Paul pointed out that the time would come when some would not endure sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2-5). The Jerusalem church continued “in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42). The inspired charge is: “Teach no other doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3).

The elders of the church are to oversee and shepherd the church and to keep the wolves out. The elders are obligated to see to it that liberals, anti’s, hobby riders, denominationalists, sowers of discord, along with all false teachers are kept out of the pulpit and from teaching error in any way in the church. The apostle John warned:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

# ELDERS AND MONEY

*Terry M. Hightower*



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## INTRODUCTION

The elders of a congregation in Texas had just given a raise to their local preacher who had been with them for six years. About two weeks later they called him into the office for a meeting and announced that they were cutting his salary **back to less than** he started for six years earlier! The reason? He was told that "our finances are dropping." As a matter of fact, two disgruntled members had told the elders that they either already had or were going to cut back (or even totally eliminate) their generous contributions unless the elders got rid of the minister. Is this not a usurpation of proper elder authority and in fact, **blackmail**? The preacher immediately found another job (in another state) and promptly moved his family. To add insult to injury, the elders paid him \$130.00 for his last week there (though he preached both morning and evening on Sunday) because he "had spent most of the week packing and not working for the church." Are such men truly qualified to lead a local church? NO! Most of us have also heard of similar cases whereby great pressure was brought upon elders to let dear Sister Bertha have it her way because "we must all remember that my great-grandmother gave us the land to put the

church building on” or “paid for every pew in this place” (with strings definitely attached!).

### IF YOU THINK PREACHERS HAVE IT ROUGH

While physicians continue to tell us about the many businessmen who are afflicted with ulcers stemming from such things as labor problems, keen competition, high overhead, and other expenses, what about the men who serve as elders in God’s church? While we extend proper sympathy to those in business positions, we do wonder what would happen if some of the same men worked under the circumstances of some elders in our great brotherhood. Although he lists other problems, Jim Dearman asks us to just suppose that: (1) your business was the largest in the world, yet was supported only by free-will contributions; (2) after you have committed yourself for several thousand dollars worth of work during the year, only a faithful few helped you to succeed; (3) week after week your employees would misappropriate funds belonging to the owner of the company, which would have gone into the working capital of the company. These things may be suppositions to the businessman, but they are realities every waking hour to the elders of Christ’s church who are given a number of unenviable tasks.

I am told that the elders in a small town were having trouble with the Lord’s Day collections, so one Sunday one of them got up and announced from the pulpit: “Before we pass the collection plate, I would like to request that the person who stole the chickens from Brother Harvey’s hen-house please refrain from giving back any money to the Lord. The Lord doesn’t want money from a thief.” The collection plate was passed around, and for the first time in many months everybody gave! I also heard about the time when a brother was hospitalized with a heart attack, his rich uncle died, leaving him a million dollars. The good brother’s family, wishing to break the news without unduly exciting the patient, enlisted the help of one of the elders in the church there. Gradually leading up to the point, the shepherd asked the patient what he would do if he ever inherited a million dollars. The brother promptly replied: “I’d give half of it to the church.” Whereupon the **elder** had a heart attack!

Just what are the relationships biblically existing between elders and money? The Bible requires Christians to give into a common treasury (1 Cor. 16:1-2) and authorizes such things as expenditures to

preachers as wages (*opsonion*—i.e., hire, pay, salary, provisions, stipend, recompense) from such church treasuries (2 Cor. 11:8). Despite possible abuses of elders' power, we must not overreact to the degree that we deny their proper God-given authority in expediencies related to church pecuniary actions.<sup>1</sup> One liberal brother's stated reasons for substituting his own "Pioneer Ministry" scheme in setting aside the Lord's plan for leadership is that his congregation saw that there "was a recognized need for some form of appointed ministry which would provide the church with a broad base of administration, cohesiveness, spiritual stimulation and guidance, and equipment for corporate ministry."<sup>2</sup> Our wonderful God knows **an eldership** can provide all of this and we must not go beyond His prescribed pattern (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9-11)! The late Otto Foster wrote:

It is necessary in any well regulated church, family or school that there be a leader, head, deciding voice. In a congregation the elders are that deciding voice. In a disorganized congregation any officious sister or contentious brother holds the veto power of the church and may impede the Lord's work. This will never happen where elders are what they should be.<sup>3</sup>

Much has already been written by scores of brethren concerning the false view that "elders are over the **spiritual** and deacons are over the **physical**." Suffice it to say that it is patently impossible to so neatly "compartmentalize" such duties, especially in view of Jesus' declaration to us in the Sermon On The Mount. He said: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 5:16). Even that which we call material things are inseparably related to the spiritual.

### **THEY MUST GENERICALLY OVERSEE FINANCES**

If elders have authority over all optional (expedient) matters, then elders have authority as to options (expedients) involved in finances. Elders do have such authority as is shown by Hebrews 13:17 and which is especially demonstrated by the words *episcopos* (i.e., overseer, one who sees that others do their jobs rightly—Acts 20:28), *prostenai* (i.e., rule, to be over, to rule, to superintend, to preside over—1 Tim. 3:5), *poimaino* (i.e., shepherd or feed adequate and proper food to the flock—Acts 20:28), and *oikonomos* (i.e., administrator of God's house—Titus 1:7). "For a bishop must be blameless, as the **steward** of God" (Titus 1:7). This tells us that elders are "stewards" of God Almighty, and the particular household over which they exert

management is the house of God—which is the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). One has only to study the New Testament duties of elders to see their authority over the work in such things as (1) benevolence, (2) classes and materials, (3) preaching, (4) lectureships and books, (5) fellowships, (6) visitation programs, (7) worship assemblies, (8) youth programs, (9) building maintenance and grounds, (10) missions, and (11) transportation, etc. Though they can and must delegate specific duties to other Christians in all the various areas of the work and worship of the church, elders are ultimately liable for even the “pencils in the pews, paper towels in the bathrooms, and administering spiritual medicine to ailing or wayward sheep.” To borrow a phrase from Harry Truman’s desktop sign: “The buck stops here!” Quite obviously, all of this requires MONEY, and not just “petty cash” either! Despite those who are attempting to use everything within their power to do away with the New Testament pattern for the eldership, the Bible fact remains that in everything from overseeing the purchase of grape juice and unleavened bread to the overseeing of the purchase of land and contracting to build an edifice for classes and worship, New Testament elders “call the shots”! As we shall point out, the eldership’s time should not be **focused** on such matters as which kind of grape juice or bread, but if in the final analysis decide either directly or indirectly that such is to be Welch’s bottle or Manischewitz’s box, then any member going against such is simply in rebellion to God. If elders “misuse” the treasury funds in the sense of failing in your private opinion to use such **shekels** in the most expedient fashion, just remember that this is the very area that God has delegated to them! If they “fail” in such, then they will answer to God for it. While we may cautiously voice our sentiment in a matter, we must not in effect attempt to add ourselves to the eldership. Should we be foolish enough to oppose the Lord’s own designated authority, Jehovah’s fierce anger against us is guaranteed (Numbers 16).

## WORDS OF CAUTION TO ELDERS

### You Are Not Merely In A Secular Corporation

The eldership’s primary responsibility or duty is to shepherd the sheep, NOT to “run” the treasury. Yet “many elders in the judgment can account for ‘every penny’ but Hebrews 13 says they will give

account for ‘every **sheep.**’<sup>4</sup> Elder, while you and your fellow bishops do oversee all areas of the work and worship of the Lord’s church, including the financial, please remember that you are in the “sheep” business and that you are **NOT** on a board for a secular corporation. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd over YOU! If you do your part well “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet. 5:4).

### **Do Not “Lord It Over The Flock”**

Elders must not “lord it over the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3) nor turn into “little popes or dictators” in **financial** matters any more than any other area ultimately controlled by them. If this principle which was set forth by the Lord applied to the apostles there is absolutely no doubt that it applies to elders:

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mat. 20:25-28).

Some husbands fail to see and apply the above principles (including the fact that they are to love their own wife as the Lord loved His church as His body—Eph. 5:22-33), being content to “pound and ground” **only** the Bible verses requiring the subjection of the wife to themselves as the “head” (Dictator or Pope?) of the home. Mark it down, they will usually reap what they sow in their personal family life just as will elders with a similar attitude reap what they sow in the corporate family of God in a local setting.

We all agree that the position of an elder is not comparable to that of an officer in the army. The centurion said of himself, “I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it” (Luke 7:8). The position of the congregation toward the elders is not that described in *The Charge Of The Light Brigade*. “Theirs not to reason why; theirs but to do or die.”<sup>5</sup>

Should any eldership attempt to lead into paths forbidden by Christ or positions and actions which are unauthorized by God, they have overstepped the bounds of their authority. Preachers (and other Christians) are then obligated to follow Paul’s instruction: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, except at *the mouth of* two or three witnesses. Them that sin reprove in the sight of all, that the rest also may be in

fear” (1 Tim. 5:19-20). No person, not even Holy Spirit-made bishops (Acts 20:28), is above being answerable to the Word of God (Acts 5:29).

### **Elders Sin When They Allow Unscriptural Fundraising**

Despite the fact that the only scriptural way for the church to solicit and raise money is from the freewill offerings of its members as per First Corinthians 16:1-2 and Acts 4:32-5:2, many elders have gotten involved in cheapening the Lord’s church by gimmickry (e.g., church car washes, walkathons, bikeathons, etc.). I will not be surprised to see brethren selling raffle tickets, sponsoring church bazaars and carnivals, or having “cake walks” just like our denominational friends. One religious group in my town had the young people sponsor a “modeling extravaganza” wherein a lot of money was raised through the sale of tickets so people could watch all the “models” walk the runway! Bake and rummage sales, of course, still seem to be the method of choice for those who either do not know or perhaps care what the Bible authorizes.

Am I against members of the church raising funds for this or that good work, including mission trips by our young people? No, but I am against both **individuals** and the church **collectively** raising money in the name of Christ or peculiarly because they are Christians. Where is the Scripture authorizing either the individual or the group to sell food under the guise of “The church of Christ Bake Sales” banner (or anything else)? Did Paul with Priscilla and Aquila make and advertise tents under the title “Tents By The church of Christ”? Does this mean that members of the Lord’s church cannot go together in business? No, not any more than members of the church must not go together in serving as part of the civil government. Tell me, if it were the case that every member of let’s say—a fifty member congregation—were to be in government offices, does that make that government function as a “church of Christ” government? Paul did not become a citizen of Rome by virtue of his religion (Acts 22:25-29), though he held dual citizenship (Col. 1:3; Phi. 3:20). Though a person is obligated to live for God in every area and aspect of his or her life, we should raise our money through the sweat of our human brows and then properly give part to the Lord as we have prospered. Notice that Scripture teaches us that the money which Barnabas, Ananias, and Sapphira raised was still in their power after it was sold (Acts 4:36-37; 5:4). I would hold

that a church checking account drawing interest or perhaps the sale of some church property (e.g., van, bus, acreage, buildings, or lecture-ship books) is permissible under the principle of being a steward (cf., Mat. 19:23). Surely, drawing interest is different than the church going whole-hog into owning car dealerships or lots, pushing real estate, building contracting, and bookstores for profit. Neither does Paul's injunction "owe no man anything" (Rom. 13:8) forbid individuals or churches from installment buying, loans, or similar monetary obligations. As our common sense pioneer brethren put it: "A debt is not a debt until it's due"; so, as long as individuals or churches make punctual payments, then there is no violation. Of course, for elders or anybody else to allow the debt to go unpaid and to make no effort to satisfy the creditor is sin, regardless of the circumstances.

### **The Treasury Is Not Your Personal Private Fund**

Not very long ago I was told that a congregation of God's people ousted the elders, the preacher, and several deacons over a situation where the elders had apparently "borrowed" from church monies for personal projects which the preacher and deacons knew about but said nothing. I am sure there was intention to "pay back" the funds, but these individuals tasted the bitter fruits of not walking "circumspectly": "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise" (Eph. 5:15). While certain actions may not be intrinsically wrong, Paul declared to all members of the church, including elders: "All things are lawful; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful; but not all things edify" (1 Cor. 10:23). The church's funds are to be used for one purpose only, namely, that for which they have been duly authorized. An auditing of the books is not a bad idea and might help prevent any misuse of church funds.

### **Beware Of Contingency Funds**

Also, we all understand the occasional need to set aside some "rainy day" or contingency funds to eventually repair the church building's ancient roof or perhaps to be partially ready to replace twenty-five-year old air conditioners. Such is just being provident or looking beyond the present moment in planning for the future (Pro. 6:6-8; 30:25; 21:20; 10:4-5; 24:30-34; 27:18; 27:23-27) just as we do in our own family budgets. Nor is it unscriptural for the church to recognize that it can in a collective sense put money at interest as intelligent stew-

ards of such (Mat. 25:27). But the church is NOT in the “banking business”! Elders must not sit back and hoard up money which should be being used to carry out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15. Woe to those elders who hoard or hide money in “secret accounts” unknown to the brethren! Woe to elders amassing great bank accounts while millions are dying lost! Woe to elders who spend fortunes emphasizing creature comforts when there are Corneliuses yet unreached with God’s only power to save!

### Nickels, Dimes, And Quarters

In view of the above, is it wise for an elder, deacon, or any other member to count the Sunday collection (1 Cor. 16:1-2) alone with no other member to corroborate such cash and currency? I know congregations where this is foolishly practiced. No one would necessarily be implying anything concerning anybody’s honesty, especially about an elder, in setting up a plan whereby at least two or three brethren “add up” the funds freely given on the Lord’s Day. In addition to the verses already given involving the key principle, I would point out that the honest-as-the-day-is-long apostle Paul pointedly **practiced it**:

And we have sent together with him the brother whose praise in the gospel *is spread* through all the churches; and not only so, but who was also appointed by the churches to travel with us in *the matter of* this grace...Avoiding this, that any man should blame us in *the matter of* this bounty [\$\$] which is ministered by us: **for we take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.**<sup>6</sup> and we have sent with them our brother, whom we have many times proved earnest in many things, but now much more earnest, by reason of the great confidence which *he hath* in you (2 Cor. 8:18-22).

Keep in mind that the apostle Judas Iscariot said:

Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred shillings, and given to the poor? Now this he said, not because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and having the bag took away what was put therein (John 12:5-6).

Appearances can be deceiving, and no elder should “react” to the constructive suggestion involving the specific implementation of a Holy Spirit inspired Bible principle: **walk circumspectly**. Should an elder develop anger at such a sensible, biblical proposal and “stomp out,” then LET HIM GO for he is not fit to serve as an elder since he is not being: (1) without reproach or blameless, (2) sober-minded and orderly, (3) self-controlled and not soon angry (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7-8).

### Watchdogs Of The Treasury

Additionally, most of us have noticed that for some reason there is human tendency for the treasurer, no matter who he is—be he member, deacon, or even an **elder**, to start “watchdogging” or “guarding” the church’s money as if it has become his sole proprietorship or responsibility. Sometimes the reason that churches cannot do greater things, such as adding a missionary to their budget every so often is that the treasurer develops the “church is going broke” syndrome, despite the fact that few churches end up going into bankruptcy court. As a teenager, I particularly remember one men’s business meeting where the men were discussing getting competitive bids for the installation of central heating and air conditioning, whereupon one brother (who shall remain nameless) “flashed mad” and arose to declare: “There’ll be holes cut in the ceiling of this building over my dead body!” **Translation:** “I will unilaterally decide this matter and throw the business to my CHA buddies in town no matter what the price!” Another brother got up in this brother’s face and calmly said: “Then it’ll be over your dead body.” The Diotrephes type stomped out and never attended another business meeting, which all agreed was one of the best things to happen to that church in several years! Business meetings now ran smoothly without power struggles. Unfortunately, some Christians seem to think that one of the most important qualifications for a man to be an **elder** is that he be successful in business affairs, and some men have been installed when they did not meet the Holy Spirit’s actual qualifications in First Timothy and Titus. A good head for business certainly doesn’t hurt or disqualify a man for the office, but this alone will not qualify him either, and sometimes this expertise can even cause an elder to attempt to “Lord it over” the other elders.

Bales gives us some pragmatic advice:

Should a deacon be treasurer of the church? The Bible does not say who is to look after the treasury; but as it involves the congregation, the elders have oversight over the treasury. If a deacon is appointed treasurer, an elder or elders should also be authorized to write checks. This does not mean that a number of different people will be writing checks about which the others know nothing. It does mean that if a deacon is sick, or out of town, someone will be there who can write checks. Furthermore, there might be an occasion when some deacon refused to write checks authorized by the elders. In such a case, serious financial problems could develop if the deacon

were [sic] the only one who could sign checks. If a deacon was treasurer, he would write checks to pay the preacher; but he would not be the one who decided how much the preacher was to be paid; nor would he have the special responsibility to raise the money for the preacher's support. He would not have the oversight of the poor; except in the sense that he served them under the oversight of the elders.<sup>7</sup>

#### L. R. Wilson points out that:

The treasurer has no power of veto. In some instances the treasurer has refused to write checks authorized by the elders. Apparently some have the idea that they are the special custodians over all the church funds. These funds do not belong to the treasurer. He has neither the authority to issue checks unauthorized nor the authority to withhold checks when properly authorized. He has no more authority or say over the funds than anyone else. When agreement has been reached in the business meetings for the spending of funds, the treasurer is under obligation to issue the checks as and when he is empowered to do so. The treasurer should be prompt in paying all accounts when the funds are available. It is regrettable that in a few instances the treasurer seems to get pleasure out of making even the preacher wait for his check. Apparently it gives him a feeling of self-importance. This is a bad spirit. If a treasurer is dilatory in his duty, he should be reminded by the elders to be more prompt. If he refuses, a new treasurer should be considered.<sup>8</sup>

Need we point out that if one of the elders is the treasurer, he is under the same obligations as anybody else, and he has no unilateral "veto" power over the other elders? He must not be allowed to domineer! In my opinion, the church should rotate the job of treasurer about every year or so to prevent Adolf Hitlerites "evolving" from the position. Beware when anyone comes to feel that the post is his by divine right, when he feels that he should not be required to make regular reports, or when he is adamantly against an audit. Does not such cast suspicion on him, especially when Paul operated differently? Elders must not be afraid to change treasurers for fear of "hurting his feelings" or for fear of his giving them trouble about it—even if it is one of their fellow elders. There should be no big or "little popes" in Christ's blood-bought church.

Need we point out that elders are instructed to "tend the flock of God which is among you" (1 Pet. 5:2) and are therefore not overseers of the finances of other congregations (Acts 14:23)? They may, of course, cooperate with other churches in benevolence and evangelism (Acts 11:29-30; Col. 4:16) just as individuals may help each other across the world. What individuals or congregations cannot do is take

over the **optional** (expedient) matters which have been reserved to the decision of each individual or eldership. (Strangely, some who ought to know better think that church “autonomy” precludes anyone from withdrawing fellowship (Eph. 5:11) or “marking and avoiding” (Rom. 16:17-18) from those not in their own home congregation, but such is not a violation of other individual’s or church’s “autonomy.” Both are free to continue headlong in the error till the end of time, but **NOT** with the approval of faithful brethren! To take over another congregation’s treasury would be wrong, but to tell them that their using their treasury to purchase mechanical instruments for worshipping God is sinful or that they are jeopardizing their fellowship, either individually or collectively, is required!).

### Pastors Are Not All-Knowing

Glen McDoniel pointed out:

One of the greatest mistakes that can be made by elders is to assume that *overseer* is synonymous with *omniscience*. While elders should be men of maturity, wisdom and understanding, it doesn’t follow that all good ideas must come from within their group. Good elders are willing to listen and learn from any source and certainly will be considerate of the ideas and feelings of others.<sup>9</sup>

In a verse just the opposite of a “know-it-all” attitude, the Holy Spirit inspired Solomon’s practical advice: “Where there is no counsel, purposes are disappointed; But in the multitude of counsellors they are established” (Pro. 15:22). Otto Foster said:

In all cases where no principle of right and wrong is involved, the elders should have due regard for the wishes of the congregation. When the question is one of mere convenience or preference, the congregation should be consulted—for example, the time of meeting; budget of the church, or even the selection of a preacher for local or evangelistic work. It is not only expedient that the congregation know how much is contributed and its disposition, what missionary efforts are supported, and such related items, it is **right**.<sup>10</sup>

Elders should heed the admonition of the Psalmist: “Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding” (Psa. 32:9a). Solomon dealt with the same point and even applied it to money: “Where no wise guidance is, the people falleth; But in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it; But he that hateth suretyship is secure” (Pro. 11:14-15). On one hand, elders must (as modern-day optimists like Joshua and

Caleb—Num. 13:30) walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) in regard to promoting the gospel as far as possible. On the other hand, elders must not foolishly overextend beyond wise common-sense counsel. We have all heard about grandiose building and growth plans going bust (and even the complete forfeiture of property) which stemmed from brethren failing to heed the admonitions listed above. In many cases the eldership was left “holding the bag”! Civil rulers (i.e., Presidents and state Governors) can squander the resources of a nation or a state, and our spiritual or congregational rulers (i.e., elders) can squander the resources of a church just as easily as an individual can waste personal assets. Seeking advice from many counselors can avert financial disaster. The Bible statement “he that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise” (Pro. 13:20) would imply that it is proper for an eldership to consult with the many talented persons in a congregation (and even with experts in various disciplines outside the church if necessary). Regardless of how smart you are, you need good advice. Remember that God gave Daniel to be an adviser to Nebuchadnezzar, whom he helped a great deal. Daniel also became a great counselor to Cyrus. Wise elders will consult with and let the ladies design the kind of kitchen facility they desire.

It should be obvious that a congregation’s shepherds must make hundreds of decisions about where, when, and what kind of “pasture” is needed to feed the flock (lest they die of starvation), including protecting them from “wolves” (John 6:35; cf., 1 Pet. 5:2; John 10:11-13). The shepherds must also decide where, when, and what kind of “water” to give the sheep lest they die of thirst (John 4:13-14). They must arrange spiritual exercises so that the flock under their local oversight may grow and be healthy spiritually. This implies that no other member of the church or group of Christians is over them in monetary transactions. If not, what is the significance in numerous Bible terms for the eldership, especially **overseer**. In collective worship someone must lead the prayers, the singing, prepare and serve the Lord’s Supper, preach the sermon, as well as take up the first-day of the week collection of funds to carry on the Lord’s work. Who decides such biblical pursuits? Whether directly or indirectly, it must be the presbyters! Of course, just as elders need not do all the teaching **personally** in a congregation, neither do they need to personally handle all the budgetary concerns. But just as we recognize the need to

get several opinions before we make important decisions in matters such as college, marriage, jobs, surgery, or new business ventures, wise elders will solicit non-binding feedback from others before determining the action(s) deemed by them to be expedient in God's kingdom.

### PERSONAL EXAMPLES OF FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

It has been said that a man in Texas would not consent to having his name placed before the congregation to serve as an elder. He said:

I drink quite a bit, and love to dance. I am also inclined to gamble and my attendance is not what it should be. Because of mismanagement, overspending, and lack of stewardship my financial affairs are in horrible shape. My Bible teaches me that elders should not do these things. I'd rather be just a faithful, humble, consecrated member of the church and let someone else serve as an elder.

Ahem! Perhaps if he offers to become the church treasurer, we ought to "jump at it"!

Since many elders during New Testament times were "worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17) and were thus paid for their important service, fellow-elder Peter specifically admonishes them to exercise the oversight over the flock from proper motives and **not** "for filthy lucre" (1 Pet. 5:2). Peter demands that elders make themselves "ensamples" or examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3b). Elders ought to be the supreme examples of personal fiscal responsibility because, after all, "if a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim. 3:5). I heard about a roofing salesman who called at the elder's private home and climaxed his pitch with: "Yes sir! You only put down a tiny deposit, then you don't pay another penny for six months!" To which the surprised elder's wife demanded: "Who told you about us?" My brethren, this ought not so to be! The elder doesn't have to be rich, but he ought to set an example of giving as he has prospered. If his wife piles up all sorts of personal debts he ought to put a stop to it by performing "plastic surgery" upon her in cutting up her credit cards! No elder should act like congressmen operate with the national debt! Brethren, let us pray for the many great and godly men who are willing not only to serve as elders but for those who truly face the job God has assigned them—including those countless tasks which involve money.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Roy H. Lanier, Sr.'s expose of Hoy Ledbetter's substitutionary or alternative form of leadership in the "pioneer ministry" in *20 Years Of The Problem Page* (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1984), 1:174-176.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> Otto Foster, *Scriptural Government Of The Church* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 1948), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Hodge, *My Elders* (Ft. Worth, TX: Star Bible, 1976), p. 28. All emphasis mine—TMH.

<sup>5</sup> Jack P. Lewis, "Greek Words For Elders," *Firm Foundation* (July 10, 1979), p. 439. Unfortunately brother Lewis holds the error that elders cannot decide such optional matters as which translations are to be used in public worship and Bible classes because they are probably the least qualified academically to deduce such!

<sup>6</sup> Verse 21 is the verse to use about this matter, instead of the KJV's imprecise rendering of "Abstain from all appearance of evil" in First Thessalonians 5:22, which actually reads "abstain from every form of evil" (cf., Greek and the ASV). In eating with publicans and sinners even the Lord could not abstain from all **appearance** of evil, but He did live up to Second Corinthians 8:21.

<sup>7</sup> James D. Bales, *The Deacon And His Work* (Shreveport, LA: Lambert, 1967), p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> L. R. Wilson, *Congregational Development* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1959), p. 112. There is much more practical advice relating to church finances in this good volume.

<sup>9</sup> Glen McDoniel, "Elders: Significance Of The Term Overseer," in *Just A Christian*, ed. Winford Claiborne (Henderson, TN: Freed Hardeman University, 1985), p. 237.

<sup>10</sup> Foster, pp. 38-39. Emphasis mine—TMH.

# ELDERS AND THE HIRING OF PREACHERS

*Frederic W. Stancliff*



Frederic W. Stancliff was born in Jackson, Michigan in 1931. He and his wife Rheba (Mathews) have four children and nine grandchildren. Fred graduated from Sunset School of Preaching in 1971. He graduated from the University of Florida (B.S. in Accounting) in 1957 and worked as a CPA until retirement. He did local preaching for six years in South Carolina and Florida, taught for six years at the Bellview Preacher Training School, and two and a half years at Four Seas College in Singapore. Fred has also done mission preaching in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Tasmania, and Thailand. He has served a combined total of 15 years as an elder of the

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## INTRODUCTION

Providing sound gospel preaching for a congregation of the Lord's church is one of the more important responsibilities that an eldership has to God and to the congregation which it oversees. What guidelines do the Scriptures give in the hiring of a preacher? How can this best be accomplished? What precautions should the elders take to avoid hiring the wrong man? These are but a few of the questions to be considered in the hiring of a gospel preacher.

The need for a study of this type is clearly evident when one looks around the brotherhood and sees congregations which are torn asunder by division and strife. How did these congregations get in their present condition? Was it the fault of the elders, the preacher, or the congregation as a whole? How can congregations avoid having such division and strife? In many instances if the elders had been more careful in their hiring of a new preacher, much of the later division and strife could have been avoided. In the following discussion several questions are listed which elders should review as they begin the process of hiring a preacher. If time is taken to answer these questions, it will not solve all of their personnel problems, but it certainly will help.

## **BIBLICAL AUTHORITY**

What is the biblical authority for the elders to hire a preacher? Although the Bible does not provide specific authority for this practice, it does provide general authority. Elders have the obligation to “feed the church [flock; 1 Pet. 5:1-2] of God” (Acts 20:28). W. E. Vine says that the word *feed* means “to tend”<sup>1</sup> which would involve providing the spiritual food for the congregation as well as caring for its other needs. Therefore, the elders must either do the preaching themselves or arrange for others to do so. Those who preach the gospel have the right to live of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14). Thus, as the elders exercise their oversight of the congregation (1 Pet. 5:1-2), they do have the authority to hire a preacher and that preacher has the right to be paid for his work.

## **WHY IS THERE A NEED TO HIRE ANOTHER PREACHER?**

Before any other questions are to be considered, the elders should first consider why there is a need to hire another preacher? Did the former preacher leave at the request of the elders, or did he leave because of his own choosing?

If he left at the request of the elders, was it due to personality conflicts with the elders? Was he trying to undermine the elders’ authority? Were the elders reasonable in their expectations of what the preacher was to do? Was he preaching false doctrine? Was he failing to preach the whole counsel of God? Whatever the reason was, is it possible to avoid hiring someone else with the same problems?

If the former preacher left of his own choice, what were his reasons for leaving? Was he not receiving a reasonable amount to support his family? Did he not like that particular area of the country? Did he leave because of the influence of his wife or other members of his family? Was he expected to do all of the work of the congregation? The answers to these questions may result in the need for the elders to review their current pay schedule and/or work assignments. In some cases, it may show that the elders should have known more about the man and his family before the man was hired.

## WHAT QUALITIES OR CHARACTERISTICS SHOULD A PREACHER HAVE?

The apostle Paul was one of the greatest preachers that ever lived. Yet, it is quite possible that many congregations today would not have wanted him as their preacher because of the following characteristics: (1) He said that he did not use excellent speech (1 Cor. 2:1). (2) He did not use enticing words (1 Cor. 2:4). (3) He had a record of causing confusion in some of the communities in which he preached (Acts 19:26-29). (4) He preached quite long on at least one occasion (Acts 20:7). (5) He had a jail record (Acts 21:33). (6) He had some physical problems (2 Cor. 10:10; 12:7). (7) He did not stay in some communities very long (Acts 14:20-21). It is evident from the above that Paul did not consider the beauty of the speaker, or the speaker's excellent speech and enticing words, nearly as important as the message of God which he preached. At times Paul's message caused confusion in the community because of the rejection of the truth by those who heard it. Elders today need to put more emphasis on the message and less emphasis upon the messenger. Naturally, it is good to have a preacher that has a reasonable command of the language in which he speaks, as well as a reasonable manner of delivery. However, perfection in those areas is not nearly as important as the preacher's determination to preach the perfect Will of God. Paul said that the power of God was in the gospel which he preached (Rom. 1:16).

Paul's qualifications which were really significant included several factors. For example, he preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). But what does it mean to preach the whole counsel of God? David Brown gives the following definition: "The whole counsel of God is referred to as: (1) 'The Gospel' (Rom. 1:15-17; Gal. 1:6-9), (2) 'The word of the Lord' (Acts 16:30-34), (3) 'Jesus' (Acts 8:26-40), (4) 'The faith' (Jude 3), (5) 'Sound doctrine' (2 Tim. 4:1-5), and (6) 'Doctrine of Christ' (2 John 9-11)."<sup>2</sup> Paul loved those to whom he preached (2 Cor. 2:4). Money was not his motive for preaching (1 Cor. 9). He was willing to preach the truth to anyone who would listen. It didn't matter if he "stepped on the toes" of kings, governors, fornicators, or false teachers (Acts 24:26; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 3). In summary, Paul said that he imitated the Lord (1 Cor. 11:1). Elders would do well to hire a preacher who would do likewise.

In the consideration of a new preacher, elders need to remember the inspired words of instruction that Paul gave to Timothy in First and Second Timothy. Paul said, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16). Also, in Second Timothy 4:1-6, Paul said,

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

Another question that needs to be considered when hiring a preacher is whether he lives in accordance with what he preaches. For example, is he truly concerned about lost souls, or is he only telling others that they should be? Does he really believe that men are lost unless they hear the gospel? Does he preach that others should be honest with all men, while he is careless about paying his own debts? Does he preach that parents of the congregation should maintain control over their children, while his children run wild?

Is the prospective preacher a stable individual? For example, does he have difficulty making decisions? When he makes decisions, is he satisfied with them? To some preachers “the grass always looks greener on the opposite side of the fence.” They are never satisfied very long regardless of where they are. Consequently, they move to another congregation every few years.

Why does the prospective preacher want or need to leave his previous congregation? Is the reason that he cannot get along with his former elders? If so, what is the problem? Is it his fault or theirs? Was he preaching false doctrine or “hobby riding”? Is he a good man morally? Is he lazy? Does he refuse to study as he should? Do his wife or children create problems for him in his relationships with the congregation and the community? These questions are not always easy to answer, but they do need to be considered.

Elders need to know how a prospective preacher stands on doctrinal matters. They need to know if he is a “hobby rider” in matters of ex-

pediency. Some elders determine the answers to the above by preparing and maintaining an updated list of questions relating to matters of doctrine and expediency. The way a prospective preacher answers those questions can be very enlightening. If his answers are straight forward without hedging, the elders can be fairly certain what he will preach from the pulpit. However, if he hedges or gives unsatisfactory answers, they will know at that point that they do not need him to preach for them.

### **WHERE DO ELDERS LOOK TO FIND A QUALIFIED PREACHER?**

It is possible that the elders already know the background of a preacher they would like to hire to work with them? The next step would be to contact him to see if he is available and whether he would like to work with them in their area of the country. If pay arrangements can then be worked out to take care of his family needs, the selection process can be greatly simplified.

Various other methods are used by elders to find a qualified preacher such as: (1) Advertisements in brotherhood papers; (2) Selecting a preacher from the men of their own congregation; (3) Recommendations of the elders' friends or relatives; (4) Recommendations of members of the congregation; (5) Recommendations of known gospel preachers; (6) Preachers that have held gospel meetings for them in the past; (7) Preachers who have spoken on lectureships for them in the past. Although it is possible that the elders might obtain a qualified preacher from any of the above sources, some of these methods will be better than others.

When advertisements are placed in brotherhood papers, the coverage of the paper may be quite extensive, which may produce a large supply of applicants, but in most cases the elders will know little if anything about the individuals. Consequently, much research will be needed to know the true background of these men. This takes valuable time. Most of this research should be done before the man is invited to come and speak for the congregation. Otherwise, unnecessary travel expenses may result. For example, an instance is known of a congregation in Florida that paid an individual to come and preach for them on a trial basis. After having paid his travel expenses and having listened to him speak, the elders of the congregation found out that the preacher never had any intention of moving to that area of the coun-

try. He apparently had decided to let the elders pay for his Florida vacation. This was dishonest on his part, but unnecessary expenses might have been avoided if the elders had known more about the man before inviting him to come and preach for them.

Is it ever wise to select a man from the home congregation as the new preacher? Yes, if he is qualified. However, some other factors need to be considered. For example, some congregations hire one of their elders as their preacher. This would be scriptural, but not necessarily expedient. For example, if the congregation only had two elders, it could create problems in determining an appropriate salary for the individual. Also, if in the future a change of preachers is desirable, it may become difficult to make that decision because of a conflict of interest on the part of the preacher-elder who may prefer not to move. When hiring any individual from the local congregation, the feelings of others within the congregation may be hurt because the elders preferred another man over a member of their family.

In some cases friends or relatives of the elders, or members of the congregation, may recommend a preacher for the elders' consideration. Satisfactory results may be obtained from consideration of these sources; however, care must be given by the elders to give equal consideration to all of those recommended. Otherwise, some may say that the elders are "lording it over the flock" (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Sometimes elders rely upon recommendations of gospel preachers whom they have known in the past. Qualified prospects may be obtained in this way, but elders need to realize that the preachers who make the recommendations may be biased because of personal relationships with their preacher friends. Nothing should be taken for granted. Careful verification of the individual's qualifications should be made regardless of who the man may be. In current times it is not uncommon for preachers who were "faithful to the Bible" in the past to suddenly make an abrupt change in their preaching. This is especially true in relation to doctrinal matters such as marriage, divorce, and remarriage when a member of the preacher's family is involved.

Sometimes elders consider a preacher who has held gospel meetings for them in the past as a possible prospect. In such cases the elders at least know the man on a personal basis and have heard him preach several lessons. If such a man is considering making a move, he would most likely be some of the better prospects.

In more recent years many congregations are holding annual lectureships and are obtaining well qualified men to speak. Some of these preachers may be good prospects for a new preacher. Of course a man is not always a qualified preacher just because he has appeared on some brotherhood lectureship. However, if the elders have approved the man to speak on their previous lectureship, they have the advantage of already knowing much about him as a speaker.

### **HOW SHOULD THE ELDERS MAKE CONTACT WITH THE PROSPECTS?**

Some elders contact their prospects by letter. This method may be satisfactory in some instances but it has definite drawbacks. For example, the postal service is not always dependable and the letters may get delayed or lost. Contacts can now be made electronically by fax or by E-mail. Although contacts may be made very quickly this way, the elders must make sure that privacy is maintained. Whether by regular mail or electronic mail, it is usually difficult to express in words the same thoughts that can readily be expressed orally.

Perhaps one of the better ways to make contact with a prospect is by phone. Care needs to be taken to make sure that at least the initial contact is kept on a private basis. It may be that the individual who is called has no interest in leaving the congregation where he is currently preaching. It may also be possible that even if the preacher is considering making a move, he would prefer that others did not know about it yet. If others are made knowledgeable of the contact, it may start rumors that would be detrimental to the preacher. For example, he may have a house that he would need to sell, and he may need more time to get it ready for sale. He may have children in school that need to finish the term.

There may be instances when the elders already have some knowledge of a prospective preacher, but they would prefer to hear him speak under normal circumstances at his home congregation. By going unannounced to the home congregation of the individual, the elders can hear him teach and preach under normal circumstances. Of course, a contact of this nature must be made discreetly so as not to start rumors. If a favorable impression is obtained, further contact with the individual could be made. Otherwise, no further contact would be needed.

### **HOW MANY PREACHERS SHOULD BE CONTACTED?**

It is not advisable to contact any more preachers than is absolutely necessary to get the qualified man the congregation needs. The selection of a preacher should not be like a parade, i.e., long and many participants. In fact, usually the quicker a good selection can be made, the better it will be for the congregation and for the ones who are being considered.

The congregation is in a period of unrest during the time it knows that the elders are in the process of selecting another preacher. Some members may be dissatisfied with the fact that the previous preacher is leaving. Some may be fearful of what the new preacher may be like. If different men are speaking for the congregation during an extended selection period, the congregation never knows what to expect from week to week. Various programs or activities of the congregation are often interrupted during this time and members of the congregation are looking forward to a time when things can be back to normal.

It is not generally advisable to contact more than one or two men at a time. For one thing, it is not fair to the men being considered to have to wait for the elders' decision over an extended period of time. If the first man contacted is acceptable, arrangements should be made to finalize the hiring process. There is then no need to look elsewhere. If the first prospect is not acceptable, he should be told as soon as possible so that he can be looking elsewhere.

Some congregations make the mistake of having a "parade" of preachers coming to the congregation to speak. This can be a very costly process if the elders are paying travel expenses for these men to come. Also, it delays the hiring process. No two preachers are alike, and it becomes difficult to remember the particular characteristics that each preacher had.

### **WHEN WILL THE NEW PREACHER BEGIN HIS WORK?**

Many elders have a contractual arrangement, whether oral or written, for the preacher to give them a certain period of advance notice if he is going to move elsewhere. Normally, the contractual arrangements will also provide for the elders to give the preacher a certain period of advance notice before terminating his employment. Of course, if the preacher begins preaching false doctrine, or is violating other contractual provisions, he may be asked to leave immediately.

The time that a new preacher will be expected to start will usually be determined by the contractual arrangements which have been made between the elders and the new preacher of each of the congregations affected. In some cases, these arrangements may be negotiable. In any event, as previously discussed, it will be to the advantage of the congregation for the new preacher to begin as soon as possible.

### **HOW MUCH SHOULD THE NEW PREACHER BE PAID?**

This is a very controversial question. If preachers were paid what they were worth, some preachers would receive an abundant amount while others would be paid very little. Generally, it becomes a question of how much a preacher needs to support his family and how much the congregation can afford to pay him.

Elders must consider the abilities of the congregation when salary arrangements are made, which is to the advantage of both the congregation and the new preacher. It would be of no value to pay more salary to an incoming preacher than the congregation can afford and then have to terminate the preacher in a relatively short period of time. Likewise, it would be of no value to pay a preacher less than he needs to support his family, which would also make it necessary for the preacher to leave the congregation in a short period of time. The financial arrangements are a necessary part of contractual arrangements before the new preacher is hired. Both parties, the eldership and the preacher, need to be honest and fair in these discussions.

The qualifications and financial needs of a preacher must be considered when setting the amount of salary to be paid. Does the preacher have a large family? Are his children small or in their teenage years? What is the preacher's educational background? How long has he been preaching? What is the cost of living in that area? What style of living is the preacher expected to maintain? What are other congregations paying preachers who have similar qualifications needs?

Housing costs are another area of discussion when considering financial arrangements. Some congregations have a house that they expect the preacher to use. Others expect the preacher to make his own housing arrangements. If the latter is the case, then the amount of pay must provide for him to do so. Are utilities to be furnished by the congregation? Some elders have found it better to increase the salary of the preacher to include a reasonable amount for him to pay his own

utilities. This will avoid questions by the elders or other members of the congregation as to whether the utility costs are exorbitant.

What about moving expenses? In more recent times moving costs have become very significant. Every effort needs to be made between the elders and an incoming preacher to work out a reasonable and agreeable arrangement for the paying of moving expenses. Most elders realize that a preacher cannot financially afford to pay his own moving expenses. However, preachers also must realize that moving is a very expensive process and they must try in every way possible to hold the moving expenses to a minimum.

### **WHAT SHOULD THE PREACHER BE EXPECTED TO DO?**

A preacher should be expected to do his God-given work, and support his family, just as other members of the congregation are expected to work and support their families. Many members and some elders have a false view of what the preacher should be expected to do. For example, some think that all a preacher does is to prepare two Bible lessons and two sermons a week. Such a concept is far from the truth. David Brown presented a good discussion of the work of a preacher in the 1996 lectureship held at the Bellview congregation in Pensacola, Florida. In regard to false views, he said that some have a

warped concept that a preacher's work consists primarily of being available for weddings, funerals, "counseling," socials, and "hospital visitation." Furthermore, he is to be good at smiling, hugging, hand holding, chauffeuring, "handyman," and telling cute jokes; overall he is thought of as a "good humor man"<sup>3</sup>

In reality a preacher's primary work is that of teaching and preaching the gospel (2 Tim. 2:2). He is to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). In order to accomplish this, he must spend adequate time studying. Elders must have an understanding with him about what work he is expected to do before he is hired. Of course, as any member of the congregation, he is expected to participate in visiting the sick and other good works. It is the responsibility of the elders to see that he is not burdened with other assignments that would keep him from his primary duties.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Bible provides the authority and the responsibility for the elders to "tend" the flock. In fulfilling their responsibility, the elders have an awesome task. In the preceding discussion, various questions

have been raised that need to be considered in assuring that the congregation is “fed” with the best gospel preaching that can be obtained. A fair consideration of the answers to these questions will help to assure that qualified men are obtained to help the elders in their task. Failure to do so will result in having unqualified men in the teaching and preaching program, as well as untold division and strife within the congregations of the Lord’s church.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), 2:87.

<sup>2</sup>David P. Brown, “The Work Of A Preacher,” *Preaching God Demands*, ed. Michael Hatcher (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996), p. 76.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

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# STOPPING THEIR MOUTHS

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“Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake” (Tit. 1:11).

Imagine the scene: you are sitting in an adult Bible class. The teacher is teaching the vital truth from Acts 20:7 that the first century church partook of the Lord’s Supper **every** first day of the week and that this is one of the distinctive differences between the Lord’s church today and the denominations. A “member of the church” pipes up and scornfully says, “A little bit of burnt bread and sour grape juice don’t make no difference!” Imagine the scene again: the teacher is emphasizing culture does not determine morality but God’s Word determines what is right and wrong. An individual challenges: “If the culture says it’s okay to offer our children burnt offerings to God, then that’s okay!” Imagine the setting once more: the teacher has taught the truth that the drinking of alcohol for recreational purposes is a sin. A “brother” says loudly and confidently, “The Bible doesn’t condemn drinking, it just condemns drunkenness!” Now, by this time you may be saying to yourself, “Well, these things surely would not happen in a Bible class **in the Lord’s church!** However, think again, because each of these incidents did happen and in the Lord’s church! The three individuals described above all have one characteristic in common, they all deserve to have their mouths shut!

In Titus 1:11 the inspired writer, the apostle Paul, reveals the will of God concerning false teachers in the church. God clearly wants their

mouths to be stopped! The damage done by such mind deceivers was that by teaching things which they ought not, they subverted whole families from the faith. The word “subvert” means to overturn, overthrow or destroy.<sup>1</sup> The same word is found in Paul’s second letter to Timothy of those who “overthrow the faith of some” by their heretical teaching that the resurrection was in the past (2 Tim. 2:18).<sup>2</sup> In Titus 1:11 *subvert* is used metaphorically of whole families whose faith was overthrown due to the damaging effect of a group of false teachers whose actual names are not stated in the text. However, these were false teachers whose names would be known by faithful elders (soon to be appointed) and faithful brethren on the island of Crete.

The motive of the false teachers under discussion is revealed by the pen of inspiration when Paul stated, “for filthy lucre’s sake.” Teaching a man-made, man-pleasing doctrine for financial gain was the practice of the mind poisoners in the ranks of the Lord’s church on the isle of Crete. Paul had warned elsewhere the inordinate love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10).

The text is emphatic that false teachers’ **MOUTHS** must be stopped. The words of false teachers must be exposed and refuted in order to preserve the doctrinal purity of the Lord’s church and to save innocent babes in Christ. False teachers’ mouths **MUST** be stopped. This must be done in order to obey God who commanded it to be done (John 14:15). It must be done so that those who love the truth may be made aware of their sin, repent, and be sound in the faith (Tit. 1:13). False teachers’ mouths must be **STOPPED** (bridled, put to silence, fenced in, closed, shut). The expression, *to stop the mouth*, originally meant, “to put something into the mouth, as a bit into a horse’s mouth... The verb used metaphorically means ‘to reduce to silence.’”<sup>3</sup>

In studying the verses preceding and following the statement revealing God’s desire that certain mouths be silenced, it may be readily seen that this brief epistle (Titus) of three chapters is a personal letter written to a young preacher beloved by Paul about A.D. 67 (Titus 1:1, 4).<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the letter relates to Titus’ purpose on Crete which is to set in order the things that are needed in the churches (Tit. 1:5). Titus is a tremendous contrast to the false teachers on Crete who preached for base financial gain in that he had “earnest care” in his heart for God’s people and was commended by Paul for not seeking to

“make a gain” of the church at Corinth (cf., 2 Cor. 8:16; 2 Cor. 12:18).

### **WHOSE MOUTHS ARE TO BE STOPPED?**

The moral and ethical climate on the isle of Crete had been, and was at the time of Paul’s writing, one of spiritual corruption. Empty chatter, lying, laziness, and gluttony had become a way of life on Crete. In their unbridled behavior these were like wild beasts and in their selfishness they were “slow bellies” (lazy gluttons). This then was the culture of worldliness out of which members of the church had come. Paul makes reference to one of their own so-called prophets years before who had correctly described the morally corrupt characteristics of the Cretans (Tit. 1:12). Secular history reveals that Epimenides (born in Crete in 659 B.C.) made such a statement.<sup>5</sup> “To speak like a Cretan” meant to tell a lie.<sup>6</sup> False teachers in the church were to become recipients of sharp rebuke. (See chart entitled: “**Titus Chapter One**” on next page).

### **SPECIFIC REFERENCE IS MADE TO “SPECIALLY THEY OF THE CIRCUMCISION”**

The greatest source of poisonous doctrine was coming from the Judaizers. The Judaizers were those who sought to bind parts of the Law of Moses on New Testament Christians. However, the Law was nailed to the cross of Christ and no longer binding on the people of God. The law by which men will be judged who live in the Christian Age is the Law of Christ (Col. 2:14; Gal. 6:2; John 12:48; Acts 2:42; 2 John 9-11). The elders of the church (once appointed) were to hold firm to the faithful Word of God against Jewish fables and commandments of men that turned men from the truth (Tit. 1:14; 3:9-11). Jesus personally dealt with those who taught for doctrines the commandments of men even prior to the establishment of His church (Mat. 15:9; 16:18). Paul personally fought down those Jews who bound circumcision on Gentile male converts (Gal. 2:4-5) and warned that those Christians who had followed them had fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). He made it clear that God justifies both Jew and Gentile through the faith system of Christ, not the Law of Moses (Rom. 3:30; Gal. 5:6). The new creature concept is the emphasis in the Christian Age (Gal. 6:15). Paul was the apostle to the Greeks and he never taught in his epistles the Law of Moses was binding on converts (Gal. 2:7;

# Titus Chapter One

## Mouths to be Stopped

- Gainsayers - Verse 9
- Unruly Talkers - Verse 10
- Vain Talkers - Verse 10
- Deceivers - Verse 10
- Particularly they of the Circumcision - Verse 10

## Their Characteristics

- Subverters of whole houses - Verse 11
- They teach things which they ought not - Verse 11
- They teach for filthy lucre's sake - Verse 11
- Liars - Verse 12
- Evil beasts - Verse 12
- Slow bellies - Verse 12
- They are defiled - Verse 15
- They are unbelieving - Verse 15
- Their minds and consciences are defiled - Verse 15
- They profess they know God but in works deny Him - Verse 16
- They are Abominable - 16
- They are Disobedient - 16
- They are Reprobates in every good work - 16

## What Some Taught

- Jewish fables - Verse 14
- The commandments of men - Verse 14

## How Elders are to Stop Their Mouths

- Hold fast the faithful word - verse 9
- By sound doctrine exhort and convince - verse 9
- Rebuke Them Sharply - verse 13

Chart by Gary L. Grizzell

1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). An evidence of Paul's faithfulness in preaching was his refusal to preach the popular doctrine of circumcision (Gal. 5:11; 6:12-14).

### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE TO SHUT THE MOUTHS OF FALSE TEACHERS?**

**The elders have the primary responsibility to shut the mouths of false teachers!** Note the last qualification in Titus 1:9 of the man who would be an elder: "**Holding fast [firm] the faithful word...that he [an elder] may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince [convict of false teaching] the gainsayers [contradictors].**" Granted, the gospel preacher is one who is involved by the very nature of his work in this endeavor (Tit. 2:15; 2 Tim. 4:1-4), but the **primary** responsibility in stopping the mouth of the false teacher in the local congregational setting falls upon the shoulders of the shepherds. The elders are still the overseers though at times the elders may request their preacher to assist them in this matter. All Christians have a responsibility to reject the troublemaker who teaches false doctrine and uphold the faithful eldership in their efforts to correct and/or reject him (Tit. 3:10; 2 The. 3:6). Faithful preachers will publicly rebuke elders who are negligent in this matter if it becomes necessary (1 Tim. 5:20).

### **HOW ARE ELDERS TO SHUT THE MOUTHS OF FALSE TEACHERS?**

Paul made it clear that those who teach things which they ought not are to be sharply rebuked (Tit. 1:11, 13). *Sharply* "signifies abruptly, curtly, lit., in a manner that cuts...severely."<sup>7</sup> The word is found only one other time in the Greek New Testament and is translated "sharpness" (2 Cor. 13:10, KJV). Contrary to some individuals' irrationality and ignorance of the Bible, rebuking sharply does not exclude a spirit of meekness nor love (see 2 Tim. 2:25; 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:2; Eph. 4:14-15). The bold Samuel grieved all night prior to rebuking King Saul the next day (1 Sam. 15:11). "But it will hurt the church to publicly or even privately rebuke the false teacher," someone may say. Friend, God's wisdom is always best in dealing with problem cases in the church (1 Cor. 1:20-21). "Loving" the false prophet in the church by patting him on his "pointed head" will not solve the problem.

## BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF MOUTH SHUTTERS

God has not left us without examples in this matter of rebuking sharply. **Samuel** rebuked King Saul for advocating that partial obedience is acceptable to God (1 Sam. 15:1-33). **Moses** rebuked Korah for rebelliously advocating a change in God's plan for church leadership by telling him he was "against the Lord" (Num. 16:1-35; Jude 11). **Nathan** sharply reproved David for holding to the position that God will accept hypocrisy (2 Sam. 11:6-15). **John the Baptist** exercised verbal sharpness with a king (Herod) by telling him in no uncertain terms he was living in adultery. His sharp rebuke of "It is not lawful for thee to have her" led to his heroic death (Mat. 14:1-12). **Jesus**, the supreme example, repeatedly called the Pharisees hypocrites in Matthew 23 and told them to their faces that Satan was their father (John 8:12-59). **Paul** rebuked sharply the Judaizers who sought to bind on men human commandments and said he did not tolerate such men for even an hour (Gal. 2:4-5). **Peter** rebuked (straightened out) Simon, the new Christian, who had publicly implied the Holy Spirit baptism could be purchased with money. What were the apostle Peter's actual words to this man? "Thy money perish with thee" (in other words he told Simon he would be in Hell in eternity if he continued on this course) (Acts 8:20-23). What was the result of this strong rebuke? Did it hurt the false teacher's faith or the church? No, it allowed Simon to become aware of his departure, repent, and begin his journey down the road of becoming sound in the faith, saying, "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me" (Acts 8:24; Note Tit. 1:13 where this is the hope of the rebuker). **Stephen** sharply rebuked the unbelieving Jews for resisting the Holy Spirit's instructions calling them stiffnecked, murderers, and hypocrites (Acts 7:51-53). (See the chart entitled "**Rebuke Them Sharply**" on the next page, which has been prepared for easy reference).

### TODAY'S APPLICATION—THERE IS AN APPLICATION!

There were false prophets in the former dispensations and there will always be false teachers in the Christian Dispensation (2 Pet. 2:1). The difficulty we face today is unbelief of Second Peter 2:1 among many of our professing elderships. Brother elder, it is a biblical fact that there will **always** be those who pridefully determine to be teachers of lies (Hab. 2:18). Some greatly desire to be teachers but do not

# Rebuke Them Sharply

## Titus 1:13

<b>BIBLE TEXT</b>	<b>THE REBUKER</b>	<b>THE GAIN-SAYER</b>	<b>FALSE DOCTRINE</b>	<b>THE SHARP REBUKE</b>
1 Samuel 15:1-33	Samuel	King Saul	Partial Obedience is acceptable - 13	You Are Rejected from being King - 22-23
Numbers 16:1-35 Jude 11	Moses	Korah	God's Plan for Leadership may be Ignored - 13	You Are "against the Lord" - 11
2 Samuel 11:6-15	Nathan	David	The Idea That God Will Accept Hypocrisy	"Thou art the Man" 2 Sam. 12:7
Matthew 14:1-12	John the Baptist	Herod	Living in an Unscriptural Marriage is Acceptable - 4	"It is not lawful for thee to have her" - 4
John 8:12-59	Jesus	Pharisees	Jesus is not The Son of God 13, 24-25, 41	Satan is your Father - 44
Galatians 2:1-5	Paul	Judaizers	Law of Moses is still Binding in regard to Circumcision	Such are False Brethren - Gal. 2:4 & Acts 15:2
Acts 8:9-24	Peter	Simon	Impartation of miracles may be purchased, 18-19	"Thy money perish with thee" 20-23
Acts 6:9-7:60	Stephen	Jewish Council	Resisting the Holy Spirit's Instruction is Acceptable, 51	Stiffnecked Murderers Hypocrites, 51-53

even know the reasons they hold the theological positions which they so fervently teach (1 Tim. 1:7). They could not give New Testament evidence for their preconceived ideas if their physical lives depended upon it! Sadly, their souls and the souls of their listeners **do** depend upon them giving a book, chapter and verse (1 The. 5:21)!

Where is their authority for their preconceived ideas of: (1) One faith is just as good as another (Eph. 4:5); (2) One does not have to know that baptism is for the remission of sins in becoming a Christian (Acts 2:38); (3) We must agree to disagree (unity in diversity) (1 Cor. 1:10); (4) True gospel preaching preached in love is never offensive to brethren (2 Tim. 4:3); (5) The Holy Spirit operates directly on the Christian's human spirit today (1 The. 2:13; Eph. 6:17); (6) Church leadership should allow sinners (non-Christians) who attend the worship services with their Christian companions to dictate the direction, decisions, and policies of the congregation? Non-Christian men and women (males are the specified leaders anyway, Titus 1:6—husband of one wife) have **no say** in the decisions of the church! Lost people are either ignorant of the truth or rebellious to the truth. They do not use the New Testament as their ultimate standard of judgment and are therefore perverted and irrational in their thinking. The author is aware of a cowardly leadership that allowed a non-Christian woman's opinion to determine their decision to dismiss their faithful preacher. What was the preacher's crime? She did not **like** him and had threatened to cease her attendance if he stayed! After the faithful preacher left it was discovered that this same woman had a boyfriend, and it was not her husband! It is very presumptuous for a sinner to seek to influence the policies of the Lord's church. Godly elders today do not live out of the consciousness of the thinking of the world (Rom. 12:2).

When a non-Christian seeks to direct the policies of the church, the elders must be willing to instruct the brethren to refrain from encouraging that non-Christian in his/her sinful course. Some Christians have taken the position, "I do not want the preacher to preach the truth with boldness because it makes my companion feel guilty for not having obeyed the gospel and this is unpleasant for him (her)." The position the Christian should take is this: "I will encourage the preaching of the truth so that my companion will see his/her irrational, lost condition and obey the gospel!" Then at home the child of God will also encourage his (her) companion to obey the true gospel.

Elders, beware! Some in the church today who want to preach, yet who are unqualified for such, preach anyway! They may know only a fable or two but off they go (2 Tim. 4:3). In more areas of the country than some would like to admit those in the pew desperately desire teachers of this stripe and will go to great lengths to get one. Having itching ears for the social gospel these will unhesitatingly discard the faithful preacher while paying an enormous salary to the man who will compromisingly scratch their ears with the “just make me feel good at all costs” gospel. These guaranteed-not-to-prick-your-hearts-preachers (if they could even be called “preachers”) could have their mouths shut **today** if godly elders would courageously take heed to the teaching of Titus 1:9-13! What would happen if the eldership of the **Woodmont Hills Church of Christ** (Nashville, TN) rebuked sharply brother **Rubel Shelly** for his statement to preachers that, “We must make it clear that we are not preaching a system, a creed, or a series of steps. We are preaching Christ.”<sup>8</sup> What would happen if those elders simply pointed out to their preacher that “preaching Christ” involves preaching not only the explicit facts of His death, burial, and resurrection but the rest of His doctrine (Acts 8:35-36; 2 John 9; John 8:31-32)? What good could be accomplished for that flock if the elders repented and, instead of upholding this gainsayer, began to warn the flock of his advocating in the liberal *Wineskins* magazine (March/April 1996) that the concepts of doctrinal “soundness” and “narrow” thinking are antithetical?<sup>9</sup> Do Rubel’s elders not know that Jesus said “narrow *is* the way” (Mat. 7:14)? How can these men stand before God in the judgment in view of Rubel’s recent statement that “there must be fellowship with other believers who see some issues of organization, polity, and doctrinal nuance differently.”<sup>10</sup> Ever read in God’s Word: “all speak the same thing...no divisions among you...be perfectly joined together in the same mind” (1 Cor. 1:10)?

### IS THE LORD’S CHURCH IN AN IDENTITY CRISIS?

In the very liberal, left wing religious magazine called *Wineskins* appeared an article entitled, “**Is It An Identity Crisis?**” (March/April, 1996 edition) by the wayward brother Mike Cope.<sup>11</sup> The editors of this paper are Mike Cope and Rubel Shelly. Consider the following statements by one of these editors. **Cope stated:** “I sense that we’re talking much more about God—the one who has

called us by his grace (rather than by our doctrinal fine-tuning) and who has called us to holy living.” **My Comments:** We should love God. We should appreciate God’s grace. Paul states that we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). However, the doctrine of God is that which reveals the grace of God to men. Someone had to do some “doctrinal fine-tuning” in order to teach the gospel to you. After all, Paul stated that the grace of God “teaches us.” The expression, “the grace of God,” is equivalent to the expression, “the doctrine of Christ” (Tit. 2:11; 2 John 9). Why slight the concept of **doctrine**? The doctrine is the New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Granted, the sincere, truly converted Christian has a deep appreciation for the unmerited favor of God in saving him from his sins by the giving of His own Son (John 3:16). Jesus died to give us His doctrine (teaching) **so we could know** of this grace of God. Let us never slam the need to study diligently and get some of that “doctrinal fine-tuning” so we can properly explain the grace of God to the lost, doomed, hell-bound sinner.

**Cope:** “I sense that we’re admitting that God has many other faithful children than those in our small ‘brotherhood.’ We’re returning to our wonderful roots: ‘Christians only, not the only Christians.’” **My Comments:** If you have been in the church for many years, take another look at Cope’s statement above. Does such a statement sound like the gospel preaching you heard growing up? Cope not only misrepresents the facts of the restoration movement but misses the vital truth that our roots are in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42). Our roots are in first century doctrine, first century Christians, the first century church (the Lord’s church established in Jerusalem in A.D. 33, Acts 2:47). We follow after the traditions (2 The. 2:15). When the Lord prophesied He would build His church, how many churches did He build? Just **one** (Mat. 16:18). When His church came into existence in Jerusalem, how many did He build? Just **one** (Acts 2:47). How many doctrines did our first-century-roots-church teach? Just **one** (Acts 2:42—the apostles’ doctrine). When Peter preached to people in Acts chapter two did they become Christians only? Yes (for example, they did not become Peterites). Did they become the only Christians on earth? Yes. There is no man living who can disprove the fact that **the Bible only, makes Christians only, and the only Christians**. When Peter preached the gospel only, it made Christians only, and the only

Christians. This is cause and effect. Consider the law of cause and effect applied to false religion: **The Koran only, makes Muslims only, and the only Muslims.** Men will agree to this. Why then will those same men deny this principle when it comes to the influence of the Bible? There's no reason to deny such a truth unless, you guessed it, it contradicts one's prejudices and cherished beliefs. I was born in the morning, but I wasn't born last morn. Cope and his kind today are preaching the **popular** doctrine of unity in diversity (we-must-agree-to-disagree, but read 1 Cor. 1:10). Any self-centered hireling who cares not for the flock of the Great Shepherd and is interested in his pocketbook and/or being popular can preach such a man-pleasing doctrine. Contrary to the claims of Cope, he **is** very interested in doctrine, **his** doctrine!

Cope is critical of smallness. What would Noah have thought of Cope's criticism if he could have heard of it in his day? Noah was a small circle man (1 Pet. 3:20). Brother Keeble used to say,

Listen friends, when Noah went into the ark, God wouldn't let Noah shut the door. God shut the door Himself. Why wouldn't he let him shut it? If God had permitted Noah to shut it, he, no doubt, would have cracked it and said, "Hop in papa, hop in grandma" (*Biography and Sermons*).

While we are not enamored with numerical smallness, the last step of growth of the Lord's church is left up to the Lord. An editor of a religious journal should know this! Remember, after we have done all we can do in teaching the lost, the Lord adds (gives increase) to the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 3:7). Jesus did not say to baptize everyone in the world, He said to preach the gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15-16). While the world (the lost of the world) is responsible to be baptized for remission of sins, the Lord did not place the burden on His church to **force** people into the baptistry. If so, where? We will not fellowship those who teach baptism is **not** for the remission of sins, but Cope does. There's the difference. The Bible teaches we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them (Eph. 5:11). If preaching what the Lord said to preach makes the church small, so be it. If preaching what the Lord said to preach makes the church larger in one geographical area of the country than another, so be it. Our duty is to obey Jesus and preach the gospel in its purity, leaving the response up to the hearers. It is their choice. **WE DARE NOT** do as Cope and others who would force the

circle to a different size than the Lord authorizes it to be. We dare not seek to lower the walls of the kingdom Christ has built under the pretense of, “we’re returning to our wonderful roots.” It’s a lie, brethren, and no lie is of the truth.

**Cope:** “Nor would I bury my head in the sand and pretend that everyone likes what’s been happening in Churches of Christ.” **My Comments:** Cope **knows** that his teaching of unity in diversity is unacceptable to many congregations of the Lord’s people. Cope and his liberal cohort, Shelly, know the truth of the gospel but are now (through *Wineskins*) perverting it. How do you know this, you say? By their fruits. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Mat. 7:15-16). Brother Marshall Keeble, who baptized thousands during his preaching work, was right when he told the church of yesteryear that we are fruit-inspectors. (Many times at the end of his public debates brother Keeble would baptize his opponent). God’s Word commands a “sharp rebuke” to “gainsayers” and teaches that their mouths are to be stopped. This is the case since they are guilty of teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre’s sake (Tit. 1:11, 13). In a day when many are seeking to turn the Lord’s church into nothing more than a denomination, we need courageous elders who are willing to obey Titus 1:13 (rebuke them sharply). We need elders who have the spirituality to realize that many times the preaching of the pure gospel without fear or favor produces little churches with big men, as opposed to big churches with little men, which the social gospel produces.

Is the church in an identity crisis? The **Lord’s** church is not in an identity crisis. Those today who preach the simple gospel of Christ are not in an identity crisis. Those who advocate speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where the Bible is silent are not in an identity crisis. Those who advocate the one faith, one body, and one baptism of Ephesians 4:1-6 are not in an identity crisis. But some men today who are in positions of influence such as Cope and Shelly are trying desperately to tell us that we are in an identity crisis so they will be able to dictate to us our identity. However, their image of the church is **theirs**, not the Lord’s. Many congregations of the Lord today are discovering that Shelly’s and Cope’s, along with many others, identity of the church is that of a church which teaches that one does

not need to believe that baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), that unity in diversity is acceptable (1 Cor. 1:10), and that “believers” include those who possess faith only (Jam. 2:24). In short, their view of the identity of the church is that the church may fellowship denominationalism (man-made religion, Mat. 15:13-14). For these editors to preach that the church is presently experiencing an identity crisis is to imply that we cannot presently preach the true identity of the church to a lost person until we allow Cope and Shelly to define that church for us. Let us determine to reject the arrogance of heretics who are presently dividing the body of Christ across the country today (and globe) in their attempt to restructure the church into nothing more than another non-unique denomination (Tit. 3:10; Rom. 16:17).

Brother elder, does “your” preacher tell it like it is? Is he preaching the pure, unadulterated gospel in the pulpit you help to oversee? Can you tell he emotionally has his “bags packed” and would unhesitatingly move on if you insisted on muzzling him from preaching the whole counsel of God? (Acts 20:27). Is he preaching the truth about the necessity of the restoration of New Testament Christianity, that there is one and only one church, that unity in diversity is the Devil’s doctrine, that the social gospel won’t save one soul, that the recreational use of alcohol is a sin no matter what culture says, that the recreational use of tobacco is sin, that immodest dress is worldliness, that denominationalism is unauthorized, that the Christian at times must withstand even his (her) relatives who are in religious error, that church discipline is God’s will, that financial church support for gymnasiums is sin, and others? If not, you need to **reexamine** the text of God’s Word when he preaches. Israel had been a long season without “a teaching priest” (2 Chr. 15:3). How long has it been since the congregation where you are an elder had a sound in the faith, Bible totin’, Bible quotin’ **gospel** preacher? If **you** have argued that we need a change (not all change is wrong if it is in optional matters) to become a part of the entertainment industry by building a playhouse (gym) out of the Lord’s treasury to attract the young people of the community and to keep the ones you’ve got, why not repent and determine to stand up for the biblical image of the blood-bought institution (Acts 20:28)? Will you remember now that our goal is not numbers at the price of truth? (Mat. 7:13-14).

Qualified, faithful elders constitute by far the greatest blessing to a congregation of God's people. However, an unqualified, un-watchful, unfaithful eldership is the body walking with two broken legs. Jeremiah had to deal with prophets who preached lies while professing to do so in God's name (Jer. 14:14). He dealt with those who saw imaginary visions and prophesied foolish things (Lam. 2:14). These were men who would not preach what was needed (out of love) to help people repent so God could—consistent with His holy nature—allow them to cease being in a state of discipline (captivity). Jesus warns all (this includes elders) to beware of false prophets (Mat. 7:15). Brother elder, do you respect Jesus' words? May God bless all faithful elders!

### MODERN DAY JUDAIZERS—THE “ANTIS”

Today, those who bind where God has not bound are the modern-day counterparts to the gainsayers of first century Crete. **Anti-ism is not a dead issue as long as these modern day Judaizers continue to fabricate commandments and bind them on unsuspecting men, women, boys, and girls.** When periodicals such as *The Preceptor* and *Guardian of Truth* set forth a number of basic truths concerning which sound brethren have no problem, but then occasionally “slip in” their error, these periodicals are revealed to be no more than deceptive ploys to deceive the simple (2 Cor. 2:11).<sup>12</sup> False teachers do not wear signs advertising such! Man-made commandments which deserve exposure are: (1) Only saints may receive benevolent help from the church treasury (2 Cor. 9:13; Gal. 6:10); (2) It is a sin for the church to eat a fellowship meal together in the meeting house after worship (even though each member brings his own food for this occasion) (Jude 12; 2 Pet. 2:13); (3) The Lord's church may not give to a scripturally organized orphan home from the church treasury (Jam. 1:27; Gal. 6:10); (4) Churches may not cooperate in preaching the gospel, e.g., in the matter of sending church funds from congregation A to congregation B for a radio or television program (Mark 16:15; 2 Cor. 11:8; Acts 15:22). They irrationally argue that many churches may send to the preacher in the mission field, but not to the church. While these misguided individuals teach us to respect Bible authority, they seem to develop amnesia on how to **determine authority** on their pet subjects (2 Tim. 2:15). When one seeks to shut their mouths, he should not be accused of creating controversy or loving strife. Let us leave motive judging to the Creator and get on with obeying God's

Word on these matters while laying all care or glory at His feet (Tit. 1:11; Mat. 7:1; 1 Pet. 5:7).

Liberalism on one hand looses where God has not loosed, while what we refer to as “anti-ism” on the other hand **binds where God has not bound**. Both are sinful (Mat. 16:19; 2 John 9; Gal. 5:1; Mat. 15:9). Let us be content to exercise balance and simply abide in the doctrine of Christ and as for those who refuse to do so, teaching things which they ought not, let us lovingly, meekly, courageously, boldly, and definitely, shut their mouths!

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., Reprinted 1977), 2:186.

<sup>2</sup>W. E. Vine, *VINE'S Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Old Testament Edited by F. F. Bruce (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1981), p. 153.

<sup>3</sup>Wuest, 2:186.

<sup>4</sup>David Lipscomb & J. W. Shepherd, *A Commentary On the New Testament Epistles* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1942), 5:259.

<sup>5</sup>Wuest, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Vine, 4:17.

<sup>8</sup>Rubel Shelly, *The Divine Folly, A Theology for Preaching the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christian, 1990), p. 80.

<sup>9</sup>Rubel Shelly, “Where Is Jesus In All This?,” *Wineskins* Vol. 2, Number 11, (March/April 1996): 7.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Mike Cope, “Is It An Identity Crisis?,” *Wineskins* Vol. 2, Number 11, (March/April 1996): 5.

<sup>12</sup>For more information on *The Preceptor Magazine* see the author's written debate entitled, *UnScriptural Binding—A Current Discussion*. (Cookeville, TN: Pillars Publications, 1996).

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# TENDING THE FLOCK

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## INTRODUCTION

The need for competent leadership has been well-documented in our nation and in the church. Many of the problems faced by the people of God could have been averted by keen leadership. It is my judgment that the greatest need in the church today is strong leadership.

We find a beautiful description of what takes place when leaders lead and followers follow in Judges 5:2. In the song of Deborah and Barak it is said “that the leaders took the lead in Israel, For that the people offered themselves willingly.” When this is the case in the church, good will be done, and happiness will characterize Christians.

God has placed elders over the church as spiritual leaders in matters of judgment. Their decisions are to be made in view of their knowledge and application of God’s principles in matters of faith. Devoted leaders are crucial to the congregation that fulfills its purpose. A congregation will never rise above its leadership.

Our assignment in this lesson is to examine the matter of leadership from the standpoint of the shepherd’s relationship to the flock for which he is responsible. As we develop this lesson, we trust we will be able to point out important things which will contribute to a greater understanding of the definition and importance of leadership.

## THE FLOCK WHICH IS TO BE TENDED

The Bible often refers to God's people as sheep (Psa. 78:52; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 13:17; Eze. 34:22; Luke 12:32; John 10:16). These references and others show how God views His relationship with His people. This figure is also used to show the relationship of the elders to the members of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). As one studies the matter of shepherds and sheep he will understand how the leadership in the church is to work and what is involved in its working as well as his responsibility in the church.

The elders are to "take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Notice from the parallelism used that the "flock" and the "church" refer to the same people. Whatever the shepherd would do for the "flock," the elders, in principle, are to do for the "church." Two things are mentioned in this verse (and more in the context which shall be discussed later) but let it suffice now to point out that the Christians are referred to as the "flock."

The elders are also to "tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight" (1 Pet. 5:2). This is, again, a reference to the church. This study, then, will focus on the relationship of the elders to the church under the figure of the shepherd to the sheep.

## THOSE WHO ARE TO TEND THE FLOCK

One of the words used to describe elders is the word *poimen*. This word refers to one who is a pastor or shepherd. Vine says it refers to "one who tends herds or flocks (not merely one who feeds them)... Pastors guide as well as feed the flock...this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence."<sup>1</sup> The pastor or shepherd is charged with at least four things relating to the flock. (1) The shepherd is to tend the flock (1 Pet. 5:2). (2) The shepherd is to feed the flock (Acts 20:28). (3) The shepherd is to lead the flock. (4) The shepherd is to protect the flock. In these four areas one sees the importance of having strong shepherds. One is also able to see that if the strong shepherd is missing, the flock will suffer.

In developing this theme, let us look at the two New Testament references which have been mentioned and tie them in with two Old Testament references illustrating the principles under consideration.

## TENDING THE FLOCK

### Acts 20:17-38

In Acts 20:17-38, Paul instructs the elders in Ephesus concerning spiritual matters. He communicates to them valuable lessons from his own experience; then he gives them some specific admonitions. Paul set an example before them of one who: served “the Lord with all humility of mind” (verse 19); overcame temptations (verse 19); and “kept back nothing that was profitable” to them spiritually (verses 20-21, 26-27).

His admonitions begin with the elders taking heed unto themselves (verse 28). The church belongs to Jesus: Before these men can oversee God’s people (1 Cor. 4:2), they must themselves be spiritually prepared. Of course, the congregation must be patient with them; they cannot be expected to be full grown the day they are appointed. On the other hand, the shepherd who is reckless with his own life will be reckless with the lives of the sheep. Carelessness cannot be tolerated in God’s leaders.

Jehovah issued a warning to the shepherd who would not take heed to himself: “Woe to the worthless shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened” (Zec. 11:17).

The second admonition to the Ephesian elders is that they take heed “to all the flock” (Acts 20:28). One cannot be a shepherd and ignore the sheep; Jesus called such a person a “hireling” (John 10:12). When the hireling is put in the place of the shepherd, the sheep are in danger both from without and within. Genuine concern must be expressed toward the entire flock.

Elders are also instructed to “feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28). To fulfill this responsibility properly, the shepherd must associate with the flock, which will cause them to smell like sheep. If pastors are not among the sheep, how will they know who is missing or take action to recover them? They cannot be fed and cared for from the security of the “elder’s office.” Good shepherds will be involved in the feeding process; they will know who needs “spiritual milk” and who needs “solid food” (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:14).

Jehovah used this same simile to describe His care for Israel. Isaiah said, “He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs

in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, *and* will gently lead those that have their young” (Isa. 40:11). The work of the Messiah was described with this same figure: “And he shall stand, and shall feed *his flock* in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah his God: and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth” (Mic. 5:4). When Jesus restored Peter, He spoke to him in terms of a shepherd feeding the sheep (John 21:15-17) which is especially interesting in view of Peter’s words on this subject.

The fourth charge given to the Ephesian elders is that they must watch in behalf of the flock (Acts 20:29-31). The word used for “watch” is the Greek word *gregoreo* which means to be alive, to be watchful, to be attentive, vigilant, circumspect. Vine says it has reference to spiritual alertness.<sup>2</sup> The shepherd was to watch in order to protect the sheep from the dangers posed by lions and bears (1 Sam. 17:34-36). In this context the shepherd is to watch in order to protect the sheep from wolves (false teachers) which would “enter in among you, not sparing the flock.”

The Hebrews writer described the work of the elders as that of watching “in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account” (Heb. 13:17). The Greek word *agrupneo* means sleeplessness. It refers to being awake, being watchful, being vigilant. It means to exercise constant vigilance over something.<sup>3</sup> One sees the idea of active work on the part of the shepherd. Those who heard the good news of the birth of Jesus were doing this very thing (Luke 2:8). Jehovah described Ezekiel as “a watchman unto the house of Israel” (Eze. 33:7-9).

As one considers this idea of watchfulness he is aware that in order to “watch,” elders must know certain things. They must know: (1) what is affecting the well-being of the congregation; (2) the spiritual standing of the members; (3) the doctrinal stance of preachers and teachers in the congregation; (4) that brethren are giving and are not covetous; (5) where benevolence is being done; (6) what missionaries are teaching and where they stand doctrinally; (7) the threats that face the brotherhood. Sheep can become helpless victims almost before one knows it. For this reason the elders must be among the sheep!

These concepts were stressed to the elders of Ephesus and need to be strongly pressed for elders today! The church will benefit from men who take these matters to heart and work hard to “feed the

church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

### 1 Peter 5:1-4

In First Peter 5:1-4, Peter is an elder writing to fellow elders about “eldering.” In this text, Peter stresses several things that are to characterize those who would “tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight” (1 Pet. 5:2). He discusses the same principles Paul covered in Acts 20. Remember that Peter had been restored after his having denied the Lord and that Jesus used the figure of the shepherd and the sheep to put him back to work (John 21:15-18).

Those who would tend the flock must take the oversight (1 Pet. 5:2-3). As one investigates Peter’s instructions in this matter, he notices that Peter approaches this duty from two perspectives.

First, Peter lists the restrictions involved in oversight (1 Pet. 5:2-3), which he stresses by the use of “not,” “nor,” and “neither.” Notice that those who would tend the flock must not do so “of constraint” (1 Pet. 5:2), “for filthy lucre” (1 Pet. 5:2), nor as “lording it over the charge” (1 Pet. 5:3). These prohibitions would prevent the elders from acting like the unconverted Gentiles (Mat. 20:25) and the uncaring Diotrephes (3 John 9-11).

Second, Peter gives the positive side of what should motivate a man to be an elder—he should serve “willingly” and “of a ready mind” (1 Pet. 5:2). He and the rest of the presbytery should be happy to be “ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3), since the mood and the motive of the shepherd is seen in his manner.

An elder who cannot be a model for the growing Christian should immediately remove himself from the position. One who oversees the development of souls must realize that his counsel can be effective only when he practices what he demands. This is part of what is involved in the qualifications of First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The Hebrews writer reminded his readers to “remember them that had the rule over you, men that spake unto you the word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7). While we certainly would not limit the authority of the eldership to example, let us never underplay its importance. There must be the example of faith which can be imitated by the flock.

The one who would tend the flock of God should be an example in giving, attendance, personal work, and other areas from which he

expects participation by the congregation. What power is possessed by the elder who can say, “Look on me, and do likewise...as I do, so shall ye do” (Jud. 7:17)! How can a man effectively shepherd the flock of God if he cannot say to the congregation, “Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1)?

The work of those who would tend the flock is to be done while thinking about the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4; 2:25), who will return and reward. Elders are not only helping the flock prepare for the return of Jesus, but they also are getting ready themselves. Their work as elders will play a large part in the preparation of both themselves and the flock for that great day.

These two New Testament passages fully underscore the importance of responsibility in tending the flock. Let us now look at the leadership principles involved in this matter from two Old Testament passages.

### **Numbers 27**

Numbers 27 provides a definition of leadership and also shows the importance of it in the smooth operation of the work of Jehovah. This matter is approached from the standpoint “that the congregation of Jehovah be not as sheep which have no shepherd” (Num. 27:16-17), which ties in with what we have previously discussed.

Leaders are defined as being “over” those whom they lead (Num. 27:16). Someone must take the initiative to lead while others follow. Everyone cannot function as a leader; there must be followers, too. Leaders must accept the responsibility of being in charge. The followers are to “obey” their leaders (Num. 27:20). If the congregation is going along and the elders are trying to catch up, this principle has been missed and the church will suffer.

Leaders are to “go out before” those whom they lead (Num. 27:17). The leader must be “out front” leading. Too many, who claim to be leaders, are willing to allow the followers to coast on their own while the leaders bring up the rear. When this is the case, the followers are in the position of leadership and confusion results. When the people of God are moving, there must be leaders who will “lead them out.” Jesus stressed this as a part of the work of the shepherd (John 10:3).

Leaders are to “come in before” those whom they lead (Num. 27:17). The idea is one of total leadership. Some are content to lead out but are not willing to see the job through and lead them in. Lead-

ership calls for total dedication to the task. A tremendous amount of time is required to be a leader. The families of those who lead must also be willing to make the sacrifice necessary in order for the man to successfully fulfill this responsibility. Our hats are off in respect to the godly families of godly leaders.

Leaders are to maintain unity. God set them forth in order that “the congregation of Jehovah be not as sheep which have no shepherd” (Num. 27:17). Leaders are to keep the people together and moving in the same direction, which requires that they be assertive and decisive. A leader must know the destination for which he is striving and the direction in which the group must travel to reach that goal.

Numbers 27 defines leadership as including the decisiveness to be in charge, the dedication to see the job through, and the determination to keep the followers united. When these characteristics are present, the people of God will accomplish great things.

Furthermore, the sheep will have peace. The most beautiful picture of the serenity which comes from effective leadership is found in Psalms 23. Notice that when the shepherds lead from the example of Jehovah (the true shepherd) tranquility is present. There will be peace in life (Psa. 23:1-3, 5-6), there will be peace in death (Psa. 23:4) and there will be in eternity (Psa. 23:6). Who could ask for anything more?

People need leaders to solve problems. The daughters of Zelophhad brought one to their leaders (Num. 27:1-11). They knew their limitations; “Moses brought their cause before the LORD” (Num. 27:5). He realized that he did not know everything; thus he sought the Lord’s help. Wise leaders will consult God’s Word in making decisions. The first question elders should ask when a decision is to be made ought to be: “What saith the Scriptures?” The solution to these women’s unusual problem would not only affect them, but also generations to come. A correct application of the Word of God sets the precedent for the future. The leaders of Israel led the way in resolving that peculiar situation. Congregations today are greatly comforted when they know that the shepherds stand ready to guide them in the right way. Members are more willing to follow those who are well-grounded in the Word.

Good leaders will consider the future. When Jehovah informed Moses that he was about to die (Num. 27:12-14), he immediately

thought of the need for a leader over the nation, and petitioned the Lord to appoint someone so the congregation would be able to function properly (Num. 27:18). Surely the Lord would not have allowed the Spirit to come upon one who was not interested in His cause. Joshua's interest in the Lord's will was exemplary.

A second qualification was that whoever took Moses' place must influence the congregation in the right way. Joshua had already proved himself in that regard (Num. 14:8-9). When elders are appointed today, members need to ask, "How will this person influence me?" Joshua was worthy to be put before the congregation and given the honor of Moses that "the children of Israel may obey" (Num. 27:20).

A third requirement of leaders is that they can be instructed in the Word of God. Joshua was to "stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah" (Num. 27:21). The position of leadership is no place for one who thinks he knows everything. Leaders must be willing to learn. If he thirsts for knowledge and takes positive steps to quench that thirst, he will continue to grow in his ability to lead. God's leaders must be willing to listen to God's Word. They must drink deeply of that spiritual well and continue to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

The church must begin, in cradle roll, to train young men to qualify themselves to serve as Elders, Deacons, Preachers, Teachers, and to fill other places of leadership. We must train young ladies to be leaders among women in the church. May all who lead and all who aspire to lead search deeply in the Word of God and make application of the principles that will make for efficient leadership.

### **Ezekiel 34:1-10**

In Ezekiel 34:1-10 Jehovah condemned the shepherds of Israel because they had not done their job with His sheep. This incident gives insight into what is required of those who would tend the flock of God.

Shepherds must be interested in the well-being of the sheep rather than having their own personal interests satisfied (Eze. 34:1-3). These men were condemned because they fed themselves instead of feeding the flock. The personal needs and desires of the shepherds should have yielded to the best interests of the flock.

Shepherds must strengthen the diseased, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring back the gone astray ones, seek the lost, and rule with compassion (Eze. 34:4). One cannot read this section of Scripture without seeing the lessons taught by Jesus and exemplified in His life. Can you not see the shepherd described in Luke 15 going after the lost one and taking care of any needs that were found, all the while showing his compassion for that sheep? Jesus said that the shepherd would be so concerned with this sheep that when he returned from the successful search he would call “together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost” (Luke 15:6). It would be sad to contemplate that the sheep could have been gone for months while the shepherds met and discussed its leaving instead of going to find it and bring it back. Sadder yet would have been the case that the sheep was gone and the shepherd did not even notice. Elders must become active in keeping the sheep and restoring the lost ones.

Shepherds must protect the sheep (Eze. 34:5-6). While the shepherds maintained their own selfish desires and refused to take care of the sheep, the lions and bears had a field day among the sheep. What a sad picture indeed! Not only were the sheep left open to attack and thus many of them destroyed, but those which were not destroyed just simply wandered off without anyone’s having been concerned and coming to search after them. Jeremiah described this type of situation by writing: “My people have been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray; they have turned them away on the mountains; they have gone from mountain to hill; they have forgotten their resting-place” (Jer. 50:6). How many Christians have been lost to denominational error, false teaching, or just plain indifference while the elders were consumed in their own pet projects and self-interests?

Shepherds will account for the sheep (Eze. 34:7-10). Jehovah said that He would “require my sheep” at the hands of the shepherds. One sees here the teaching of Hebrews 13:17. Jeremiah echoed this same thought when he wrote: “Therefore thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, against the shepherds that feed my people: Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith Jehovah” (Jer. 23:2). Elders must understand that they will give account of their activity as

elders, which is a responsibility to be taken lightly. Members need to cooperate in every way with the men willing to shepherd them.

### CONCLUSION

Tending the flock of God is serious business. We need to train men to be good shepherds of the flock. Those good men who have qualified themselves as elders of God's flock should be admired and respected. What a wonderful privilege it is to be tended, led, fed, and protected by great shepherds.

Leadership is crucial, and its importance is certainly stressed in the matter of tending the flock of God. We pray for the shepherds who tend the flock and try to encourage them in every way possible. We warn the unqualified of the terrible consequences awaiting those who would fail in this awesome responsibility. We trust that by working together, great good will be done in this world and many souls will be saved in eternity.

In many loyal churches throughout our great brotherhood fine, true men are at the helm and, unnoticed and unheralded, they sacrificially point the way to a glorious future. They are not mean and abrasive men, but they are leaders, and God knows how desperately we need them.

Eric Hoffer unwittingly described faithful bishops in the church when he wrote, "The leader personifies the certitude of the creed and the defiance and grandeur of power. He articulates and justifies the resentment damned up in the souls of the frustrated. He kindles the vision of a breath-taking future so as to justify the sacrifice of a transitory present...so indispensable for the realization of self-sacrifice and united action."<sup>4</sup>

Let us all study the four passages examined in our discussion carefully and be impressed with the lessons that are found therein. Let us build for the future and work to improve the present. Let us understand the importance of leadership in the church and let each member contribute his part make it successful. God's wisdom provided for there being saints, bishops, and deacons in the church (Phi. 1:1). Thanks be to God for those who are "tending the flock."

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary Of New Testaments Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), p. 167.

<sup>2</sup>Vine, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>H. A. Dobbs, "Good Elders," *Firm Foundation* 107 (January 1992): 3.

# INSPIRING BRETHREN TO GOOD WORKS

*Guss Eoff, Jr.*



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In 1974, he went on a preaching Safari in Tanzania, East Africa, that covered 20,000 miles before he returned home. In 1995 he held his tenth campaign in Malaysia and Singapore and conducted a Soul Winning Work Shop.

He conducted the first television program for churches of Christ in Northern California and has conducted weekly programs in California and Texas. He also conducted daily radio programs as well as weekly programs in California, Oregon, Texas, and Louisiana.

In February, 1993, Guss and his wife of fifty-two years, Laline, moved to Mathis, Texas to work with the congregation there. He speaks on about six lectureships each year.

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ said, “Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Mat. 5:16). There is no doubt that the Word of God teaches that Christians be involved in “good works.”

The great Apostle Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus concerning the matter of “good works.” “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

God created Christians and appointed beforehand that they should walk in “good works.” In other words, God previously determined that Christians should live holy lives. Before the foundation of the world, God determined that Christians should be holy without blemish. Paul stated again,

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph. 1:4-5).

God appointed beforehand that saints should walk in “good works.”

### WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS?

Whatever they are, they are important; otherwise, God would not have said so much about them. The apostle Paul wrote to Titus and mentioned “good works” several times in his letter. Notice four times that he speaks about this subject. “In all things showing thyself an example of good works; in thy doctrine *showing* uncorruptness, gravity” (Tit. 2:7).

Jesus died that He might redeem man from sin. Those who are redeemed by their obedience, are made pure. They have been purchased by the blood of Christ in order to perform “good works.” “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14).

Faithful believers in God are to practice, as a matter of habit, “good works.”

Faithful is the saying, and concerning these things I desire that thou affirm confidently, to the end that they who have believed God may be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men (Tit. 3:8).

“And let our *people* also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful” (Tit. 3:14).

Paul, the apostle, wrote to Timothy, the evangelist, and told how important it was for women to dress in modest apparel. They were to dress properly and show their godliness through “good works.”

In like manner, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety; not with braided hair, and gold or pearls or costly raiment; but (which becometh women professing godliness) through good works (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

Before a widow can be enrolled as a care of the church, she must have met certain qualifications. Notice that one of those qualifications is “well reported of for good works.”

Let none be enrolled as a widow under threescore years old, *having been* the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she hath brought up children, if she hath used hospitality to strangers, if she hath washed the

saints' feet, if she hath relieved the afflicted, if she hath diligently followed every good work" (1 Tim. 5:9-10).

Paul informed Timothy that "good works" cannot be hid. "Some men's sins are evident, going before unto judgment; and some men also they follow after. In like manner also there are good works that are evident; and such as are otherwise cannot be hid" (1 Tim. 5:24-25.)

The apostle Paul also teaches that Christians are to be rich in "good works."

Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they be not highminded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the life which is *life* indeed (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

In the first letter to Timothy we see a number of "good works" mentioned. Certainly, proper dress must be considered a "good work" along with godliness. A good Christian wife that has raised godly children has done a "good work." To be hospitable to strangers, to relieve the afflicted are "good works." The willingness to share what we have with others is a "good work."

Examples of "good works" are mentioned in the book of Titus. Paul states that uncorruptness, gravity, sound speech, being in subjection, denying worldly lusts, living soberly, righteously and godly are "good works." Then in chapter three of Titus, Paul adds more "good works." He states that Christians are to be in subjection to rulers and authorities. They are to be obedient, to speak evil of no man, not contentious, gentle, meek toward all men.

It is no wonder that the Hebrews writer admonishes, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24).

### TO INSPIRE BRETHREN

The theme of this lesson is to inspire brethren to "good works." The word *inspire* means, according to Webster:

1. To blow or breathe into or upon.
2. To blow or breathe; to infuse by breathing.
3. To draw in by breathing; to inhale—opposed to expire.
4. To infuse into as if by breathing; to affect as with a supernatural influence; to give inspiration; to enliven.
5. To infuse in the mind; to communicate to the spirit; to convey as by a divine or supernatural influence.<sup>1</sup>

It would be wonderful if we had the ability to just blow into our brethren the desire to do “good works.” I have shouted, I have begged, I have prayed, even cried, trying to get brethren to really get involved in “good works.” I must admit that I have not been very successful. Now, after fifty-five years of preaching, I have learned the secret. In order to inspire brethren, we must blow into them, or breathe into them. But how? Have you ever tried to blow up a balloon? Wow! What a lot of resistance! Some brethren resent this blowing, as though we have halitosis. So, I think I shall try to “infuse in the mind” a desire to do “good works.”

Why would a person want to do “good works”? We must motivate people to do “good works.” We must give them a reason. The first reason is because God tells us to do so. Next, “good works” rewards us with feelings of comfort and consolation. We are examples of the best way of life. We let our “lights shine before our fellow men.” They see our “good works”; thus, they “glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Mat. 5:16).

When we do good things for our friends, our neighbors, and even our enemies, there is a reward. There is the feeling of great satisfaction! We overcome our feelings and resentments; then our attitudes are changed. Most of all God is pleased because we have done His will.

### **REWARDS OF “GOOD WORKS”**

Doing “good works” has great rewards! Not only is there the inward satisfaction, but many times our good works will result in conversions. Let me give one example. While living in Oregon in the mid 1940s, I was preaching for the congregation in Newburg, Oregon. The congregation was small, and so was my salary. We struggled just to pay our bills.

A neighbor told of a lady that had four children. Her husband had deserted the whole family, and they were staying in a garage with a dirt floor. The mother was sick in bed and they had no food. The ground was frozen and silver thaw pushed forth from the earth. There was no wood for the small wood stove. The children were trying to keep warm in bed with their sick mother. When my wife and I saw their plight, we were moved to tears. Something had to be done at once! I went to my woodshed and filled my 1930 Chevrolet with wood to take to this family. My wife gathered jars of corn, green

beans, black eyed peas, cherries, applesauce, salmon, peaches, pears, and other things she had canned. I went to a little corner store, where we traded, to buy milk, bread, and some meat. I told the owner what I was going to do and to give me as much as he could for what money I had. He told me, "I am going to give some flour, eggs, potatoes, and other things." I thanked him for his kindness. He told me that he appreciated the good I was doing. When Lily and I went into that garage with all that food and I carried in the wood and started the fire, you cannot believe the look on that group's faces. Lily cooked food, and they ate as if they were starving. I am sure they were almost at that point. The children thanked us. They hugged us. One little boy asked me if I was God. I asked why would he think such a thing. He said, "Momma has been praying for God to give us something to eat, so when you brought us food, I thought you must be God." I told him that God gave the food, but that Lily and I just carried it to them.

This "good work" opened the door to teach this lady the Truth. She was converted and later her oldest daughter was also. When we left Newburg, Oregon, she was still faithful to the church. Thank God for such a reward for a "good work." Lest I forget, the good brethren bought shoes and gave clothing for the whole family. Everyone contributed. It was just one example of a "good work."

Yet, these "good works" prove our faith. To show that faith alone is not sufficient to save us, James tells us that our works are an absolute necessity.

What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself. Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from *thy* works, and I by my works will show thee *my* faith (Jam. 2:14-18).

In the ninth chapter of the book of Acts, we read of a faithful Christian woman that was known because of her "good works." "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did" (Acts 9:36).

When this loving saint died, the disciples sent for the apostle Peter to come down to Joppa. Peter was only about fifteen miles away in Lydda. When he arrived at the house of Dorcus, he was taken to

where her body lay in the upper chamber. “And all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them” (Acts 9:39b).

The Bible says that Dorcas was full of “good works.” Well, what were those “good works”? There can be no doubt about them. She was a talented lady who made clothing for people to wear. The Greek word ἐλεημοσύνη (*eleemosune*), according to W. E. Vine means:

connected with eleemon, merciful, signifies (a) mercy, pity, particularly in giving alms, Matt. 6:1 (See below), 2, 3, 4; Acts 10:2; 24:17; (b) the benefaction itself, the alms (the effect for the cause), Luke 11:41; 12:33; Acts 3:2, 3, 10; 9:36 “alms-deeds”; 10:2, 4, 31.<sup>2</sup>

Thayer says concerning *eleemosune*: “1. Mercy, Pity—especially as exhibited in giving alms, charity—Acts of beneficence, benefactions—2. The benefaction itself, a donation to the poor, alms.”<sup>3</sup>

Here was “good works” done by Dorcas. She made garments and gave them to those in need. This is another “good work” done by saints.

As we read the first four books in the New Testament, we see the “good works” of the Son of God. We understand that these books reveal things done by Jesus while He lived under the Old Law of Moses. We also realize that the Old Law remained until it was fulfilled by Jesus. During His ministry, Jesus performed “good works,” too many to be mentioned in this writing. Why would anyone want to condemn the Christ for doing “good works”? This is the very question that Jesus asked the Jews.

I and the Father are one. The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from the Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God (John 10:30-33).

The Jews could not deny that Jesus performed many “good works.” If we are to do “good works,” we can certainly see what they are by reading the life of Jesus Christ. The Jews said that they would not stone Jesus for doing a good work, but when He claimed to be God with His Father, they claimed He had blasphemed.

Thank God! Jesus left us many great examples of “good works.” While thinking about examples of “good works” in hopes of inspiring brethren to become involved, many things come to mind. Of course, the bad deeds always seem to obscure or blur out the “good works”

that we have done. The bad things always seem to have precedence over good things. At least they always come to mind.

A “good work” that we may have been lax in doing is opening our homes to those in need. Great opportunities are afforded us in this area, especially with children. Through the years Lily and I have taken children into our home. While living in Oakland, California in the late 1940s, we took a little girl and her brother into our home. The young Christian mother died. She was a member of the church in San Francisco. Here was a great need, so we answered the call. We did not keep the children for very long, but it was a “good work.”

In Stockton, California a teenage Christian young lady had problems at home. This girl was a member of my teenage Bible class. In hopes of helping with her problems, we took her in and tried to make her a part of our family. We had our son, who was in the fourth grade; he accepted the babies in Oakland and the teenager in Stockton. Things went well for a while with the young lady, but when I had to set rules about her studying her lessons for school and going out, she felt I was too strict. She did not stay long, but we did a “good work.”

Our little family moved from California to Texas. Circumstances with the church in Stockton were very disappointing; so I moved to San Marcos, Texas to live with my father and work with him in the butcher shop. I had made up my mind to never preach again in a full time capacity for the church. The elders at Lockhart, Texas, seventeen miles from San Marcos, tried to get me to preach for the congregation. I steadfastly refused. After about six weeks of visits and phone calls, I agreed to fill in until they could hire a man. After about three months, I accepted the work of full time preaching.

Several months later, a lady, who was a member of the Lockhart congregation, called to tell me of a young girl about fourteen years old. This girl’s father was in prison. Circumstances kept her from attending school, and she was going from house to house of members of the church. She was being used to clean houses. She was scrubbing floors, washing clothes, and being used as a maid. Something needed to be done to care for this child; she needed to be in school. My sweet wife and I talked it over, and we took her to be our daughter. Yes, it was a sacrifice! But our son accepted her as if she was his sister. We kept this young lady for several years. Later she married and now has her own family. She is a faithful Christian and keeps in touch with us.

She continues to thank us for what we did. That was a “good work.” Not only has this “good work” helped the children, but it has helped us.

Let me give one more example. In 1959, Lily, Larry, and I moved to Hong Kong to do mission work. We started the church in Hong Kong, and we met in our house. When Lily’s birthday came, I went downtown to buy her a small beaded purse. A young Chinese, the sales lady, came to wait on me. During our conversation, she asked me if I was an American. I told her I was. “What are you doing in Hong Kong?” she asked. “I am a teacher,” I replied. Later she told me that when I said I was a teacher, she thought maybe I could help her with her grades. Of course, I thought, I can teach this little Chinese doll and convert her. This little lady was seventeen years old. She was four foot and nine inches tall, and she weighed eighty-six pounds. We made friends, and later I baptized her. Lily and I took her into our home. She continued her schooling, and we bought her clothes and gifts. After we left Hong Kong, our little girl married and moved to Canada. We love her until this day, but her husband has pulled her away from the church. God knows we did a “good work.”

### **WE MUST ABSTAIN FROM EVIL WORKS**

In our effort to inspire brethren to do “good works,” we must also plead with them to abstain from evil works. The Word of God informs us of things that are evil and how the children of God must not participate in them. The world rejected Jesus because He declared that its works were evil. “The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that its works are evil” (John 7:7).

It is true that the world rejected the Christ. It must be remembered that Jesus rejected the world first. Jesus is the light of the world. The world was in darkness and sin; there was no hope of being reconciled to God. Then came the light. “The people that sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them that sat in the region and shadow of death, to them did light spring up” (Mat. 4:16). “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me may not abide in the darkness” (John 12:46). “Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Jesus Christ, the light of the world, was rejected by the masses of humanity. He is still rejected by them because their works are evil.

And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reprov'd (John 3:19-20).

Christians, not only must abstain from evil works, but they are to shun them, and they must reprove evil works. "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

The children of God, those who are born again (John 3:3-5), are new creatures. They no longer walk in the evil works in which they once lived. This state of evil works was the very path that the Ephesians Christians once walked.

And you *did he make alive*, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest:—but God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved) (Eph. 2:1-5).

This is the same walk that Christians in Colosse had once tread. They walked in evil works. "And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works" (Col. 1:21).

Now we can see that things have changed! Saints are new creatures! The old man is dead. Paul said, "We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?" (Rom. 6:2). Those in Christ are new creatures, "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Some who profess to know God still walk in their same old evil works. Thus, we can know if they are truly walking in the light. Paul wrote, "They profess that they know God; but by their works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Tit. 1:16).

As our Lord taught, men love darkness rather than light, because their works are evil. On the other hand, those who love the Truth come to the Light and show by their "good works" they have been wrought in God. "But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God" (John 3:21).

## HEAVEN—THE GREATEST REWARD

Our Lord Jesus taught His disciples the necessity of doing His work. Saints must be faithful, working at all times. The Son of God gave a parable to teach us this very thing. “*It is as when a man, sojourning in another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, to each one his work, commanded also the porter to watch*” (Mark 13:34).

When our Lord comes again He will render to each person according to his work. “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds” (Mat. 16:27).

Christians can be positive that God knows about our works. He has given us assurance, and that assurance should encourage us to do “good works.” “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister” (Heb. 6:10).

John, in the Revelation, tells us that God knows of our works. “I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false” (Rev. 2:2.).

James tells us that we will be justified or condemned by our works. “Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith” (Jam. 2:24).

We are going to be judged by our works.

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works (Rev. 20:12-13).

Those that are faithful to the Lord in “good works” will be able to rest from their labors. “And I heard the voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them” (Rev. 14:13).

Brethren, it is such a rewarding thing to do “good works.” Not only do we receive blessings now, but we have yet to receive the greatest

reward of all, Heaven. God, help us to inspire one another, yea, “to provoke unto love and **good works**” (Heb. 10:24).

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Webster's New International Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, Publishers), 3:1287.

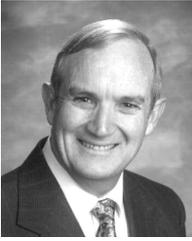
<sup>2</sup>W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (London, England: Oliphants Ltd.), 1:48-49.

<sup>3</sup>*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon on the New Testament* (New York, NY; Cincinnati, OH; Chicago, IL: American Book Company), p. 203.

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# DECISION MAKING IN LEADERSHIP

*Curtis A. Cates*



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## INTRODUCTION

On the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, He established His church/kingdom (Isa. 2:2-3; Eph. 3:10-11; Dan. 7:13-14; Mat. 16:18-19; Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; et al.). Christ is the head of the church (Col. 1:18), the king of the kingdom (Acts 2:29-36), as He prophesied in Matthew 19:28; John 20:21-23; and Luke 22:28-30. He delegated authority to bind and loose on earth what had already been bound and loosed in heaven, in the mind of God the Father (Mat. 16:19; 18:18). Christ similarly has placed elders in places of authority over local congregations of His people to expedite the carrying out of the commandments, the law of Christ over the church—which laws are revealed in the New Testament (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17; Phi. 1:1). In other words, the local congregation is a system, or organism, over which God has placed elders and given those elders the critical re-

sponsibility, under the Lord Jesus Christ (Mat. 28:18), of seeing that the work of the church—glorifying the Lord in its purpose, beliefs, teachings, worship, growth, and function—is carried out (Eph. 3:21). Indeed, the Lord has a pattern—an overall blueprint and exalted purpose for His body. He knows and reveals what He intends for His people to accomplish. He rebuked the church at Sardis, “for I have not found thy works perfect” (Rev. 3:2).

To accomplish God’s mission for the church, planning is a must; every system to survive must function successfully. A foremost systems analyst, C. West Churchman, citing as evidence the fact that man, unlike brute beasts, has the “ability to think ahead—to plan,” says, “The way to look at the whole system is in terms of a plan.” He defines planning thus: “Planning means laying out a course of action that we can follow that will take us to our desired goals.”<sup>1</sup> Those of us who have studied/taught physics are very familiar with the laws of inertia, which state (among other things) that objects at rest tend to remain at rest, and those in motion tend to remain in motion, in the same direction, until and unless acted upon by some outside force(s). The same basic principle is applicable in organisms (people and systems). McLean and Weitzel declare,

It takes some effort to break inertia, to get moving, physically or mentally. Those who have never led anything are, of course, at rest insofar as leadership is concerned; and the longer they remain inert vis-a-vis leadership, the more difficult it will be for them to become motivated to lead.<sup>2</sup>

The local congregation, to accomplish its work, must have capable, wise, working leadership.

Probably the most significant element of the administrative role of the eldership (the eldership serves as and has authority as a whole, a unit, and **not** as individuals, in isolation from each other) is decision making relative to expediting and implementing the commands of the Head, Christ, coupled with moving the local congregation toward its goals through action proceeding from and based upon those decisions. In this study we will examine: (1) the function of the congregations as an organism; (2) the absolute necessity of elders having authority; (3) the critical need of quality leadership in the local church; (4) the role of decision making in administering the affairs of the congregation; and (5) the influences which impact the decision making and implementation function of the elders.

## THE LOCAL CHURCH AS A SYSTEM

The local church functions in the world, its environment. It must maintain its “homeostasis,” or its steady state of interaction, by exchange—input and output—of energy and information. Its failure thus to interact with its environment (i.e., its community, city, county, state, nation, world) leads to the eventual demise of the congregation, if not rectified. One familiar with the second law of thermodynamics in science knows that any closed system degenerates. Disorganization, or “entropy,” increases inevitably in such a congregation until it exists no more. Likely, the reader is sadly familiar with just such former congregations.

The human body, as an organism, must maintain certain “key attributes” or variables (temperature, blood pressure, blood count, weight, etc.) indicative of a healthy body relative to digestion, respiration, circulation, and excretion. Likewise, the congregation must maintain certain attributes (growth in spirituality, edifying the saints, caring for the needy, having a moral and spiritual influence upon the world, carrying the gospel to the lost, etc.) indicative of a healthy congregation relative to cohesiveness, inter-personal relations, information flow, boundary maintenance, cross-boundary transactions, and progress toward the goals. To starve the human body and deprive it of regular and adequate nourishment and/or expose it to aggressive germs, grievous diseases, and persistently malignant cells brings certain death (unless the condition[s] is soon arrested). The same is true for churches of Christ. The Galatians had been bewitched, being removed from the doctrine of Christ (Gal. 3:1; 1:6-9; 5:4). The Ephesians had left their first love; soon, without repentance their candlestick would be removed (Rev. 2:4-5). Christ was threatening to do battle against the Nicolaitans in the church at Pergamum; He held some things against the church for this continued association (Rev. 2:14-16). Sardis was dead (Rev. 3:1), and Christ was on the outside, trying to get back into the hearts of the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:20). Leadership, dear reader, is critical!

## THE LOCAL CHURCH OVERSEEN BY ELDERS

The local congregation is composed of subsystems, or components, which are interrelated and which must work together to achieve the goal. The components may include (if the congregation is fully scrip-

turally organized) such as the elders, deacons, evangelists, teachers, as well as other saints.

The elders have the responsibility of feeding and protecting the flock (Acts 20:28-31), of watching over the souls (Heb. 13:17), of “holding fast the faithful word,” of exhorting in the “sound doctrine,” of convincing (convicting) the gainsayers (Tit. 1:9), of stopping the mouths of false witnesses (Tit. 1:10-11), of tending “the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight” (1 Pet. 5:2ff), et al. The oversight belongs not to the deacons (sometimes thought of as “junior elders”) nor to the evangelist but to the eldership.

Furthermore, the elders have **authority**. To hold that elders have no authority—except by example, which is **no** authority—is ludicrous, as well as constituting heresy; those errorists holding that position are naive. Yukl observed,

The exercise of authority by some persons over others is necessary for most organizations. The complex pattern of role specialization and the great amount of role interdependence in large organizations make it essential for each member to conform to role expectations. The organized, coordinated effort responsible for system effectiveness is disrupted by failure of key individuals to perform reliably their expected functions.<sup>3</sup>

Yukl defined “power” as a person’s “potential capacity to influence a targeted person,” perhaps “to influence the targeted person’s behavior in the direction desired by the agent.” Sometimes this can mean to have “influence over a target person’s attitudes and values as well as over behavior.” It can also mean “potential influence over a collection of people, or over processes and decisions.” “Power is considered to be a dynamic variable that depends on the relationship between agent and target person(s).”<sup>4</sup>

There is a difference between “power” and “authority.”

Power is the agent’s capacity to exert influence, but authority is the agent’s **right** to exert influence. Authority can be defined in terms of the relationship between formal positions in an organization. It is the right of one position to influence specified aspects of the behavior of the other position occupant.<sup>5</sup>

As has already been pointed out, under Christ as Head of the church, elders in the local congregation have responsibility over the flock. **No person or group in their right minds would dare assume responsibility for which there is no accompanying authority.** What

a lame, botched “setup” to blame on the Creator, who has all wisdom!<sup>6</sup>

### **THE NEED FOR QUALITY LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

No organization—whether a business, a city, an educational institution, the home, or a congregation—can be stronger than its leaders. They must be leaders of vision, enthusiasm, talent, energy, wisdom, and knowledge.

The effective functioning of social systems ranging in size from the local PTA to the United States of America is assumed to be dependent on the quality of their leadership. This assumption is reflected in our tendency to blame a football coach for a losing season and to credit a general for a military victory. While one can identify many factors influencing organizational effectiveness, some of which are outside the direct control of those in positions of leadership, the critical importance of executive functions and of those persons who carry them out to the survival and effectiveness of the organization cannot be denied.<sup>7</sup>

Elders in each local church have the responsibility to execute the commands of God, to see that they are carried out; their function is critical.

Elders oversee the flock by authority of the Spirit. “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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). He gives the qualifications, role, responsibilities, and authority of elders in the Word; when men are appointed and function scripturally, they are appointed by the Holy Spirit’s sanction and backing. That an elder is qualified to serve in that capacity is critically important, not only in meeting with God’s approval but also in being followed by the congregation. “One prerequisite for acceptance of a leader’s authority is the perceived legitimacy of the person as an occupant of the leadership position. This aspect of legitimacy depends on how the leader was selected.”<sup>8</sup> Of course, the congregation selects and appoints elders by the direction and authority of the Word. Those who are considered and appointed as elders should have a record of hard work, achievement, and faithfulness. Potential leaders should have the capability of seeing what must be done and leading in accomplishing it. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy challenged the country to follow him, and we would put a man on the moon in that decade. Frank Borman, president of Eastern

Airlines, on occasion advertized, “We earn our wings every day.” When Charles M. Schwab worked for Andrew Carnegie, he was taught an important lesson. “‘All records broken yesterday,’ Schwab once wired to his chief; in reply to which Carnegie telephoned ‘But what have you done today?’”<sup>9</sup>

Our Lord Himself commanded, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). Elders must truly be men of vision and men of hard work. “If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). The observation has been made that “Each of us tends to do our best when we know we’re being watched by the right people.”<sup>10</sup> But, many things should motivate God’s leaders; not only are those who are being led watching, God is watching. And think of all the precious souls that depend upon faithful leadership!

Walt Disney was a man of energy and of vision. “The story is told of a tourist at fabulous Disney World in Orlando, Florida, remarking, ‘What a shame Mr. Disney never saw all of this.’ ... ‘Oh, but he did,’ replied the guide, ‘that’s why it’s here!’”<sup>11</sup> Vision has much to do with success and destiny of any congregation. What do you see, dear reader? Do you have a vision for souls? “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35). Effective leaders are able to challenge and move the congregation to fulfil the Lord’s purposes in their individual lives and in the congregation as a whole. Thus, a leader can be defined as:

problem-solver or decision-maker—that the task of translating problems into solutions is inevitably **his** task. Alternatively, one can view the leader’s task as one of determining the mechanism or process by which the problem is to be solved. A major portion of his job is to determine what person or persons should take part in the solution of the problem.<sup>12</sup>

Leaders come with plans, programs, and activities which enable organizations to achieve their goals, in this case, local congregations.

### **THE ROLE OF DECISION MAKING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

In leading or managing any organization, planning is critical. If master or overall planning is not done, or if the planning is poor, those in the leadership are going to spend much time managing under crisis

situations (sometimes termed “fighting fires”) and dealing with crises which otherwise might have been avoided.

Planning and control are perhaps the most basic and pervasive of all management functions. Planning is essentially an intellectual activity which involves setting goals and determining how they are to be achieved. It renders human behavior in organizations less random and unpredictable. It gives direction and purpose to an organization’s activities. As someone once said, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” Organizational controls, on the other hand, seek to ensure that plans are being followed.<sup>13</sup>

“Planning, organizing, controlling, decision-making, and leadership have been generally identified among the most important functions of management.”<sup>14</sup>

Decision-making is the focus of most managerial activities. All of us make decisions which have direct implications for our own behavior. The manager, however, makes decisions that are intended to influence the behavior of others.

In its most simple form, decision-making is a logical and rational process of identifying objectives or goals and creating and choosing among alternative strategies or means for achieving them. Making sound managerial decisions, however, is not a simple matter; many factors must be weighed according to the best available information, whether fact or guess. In the latter, it is more an art than a science.<sup>15</sup>

In Barnard’s classic work *The Functions of the Executive*, he stated,

When decision is involved there are consciously present two terms—the end to be accomplished and the means to be used. The end itself may be the result of logical processes in which the end is in turn a means to some broader or more remote end.... But whenever the end has been determined, by whatever process, the decision as to means is itself a logical process of discrimination, analysis, choice.<sup>16</sup>

Elders are decision makers, and to study how as nearly as possible to make good and valid decisions is helpful to the process. According to Claude S. George, management thought has changed through the years.

The management decision-making process likewise has undergone changes through time. Apparently, in the early days, managers made decisions based to a large degree on hunch, intuition, and guess. F. W. Taylor recognized this and preached the word of scientific analysis instead of rule of thumb. Gradually through the years managers have turned to scientific rather than intuitive approach to problem solving, as did Taylor. And once they recognized the value of the scientific approach to making decisions, managers

have continued to develop their skills in the use of scientific rather than haphazard decision-making models.<sup>17</sup>

The nature and purpose of the New Testament church does not change, nor does its organization. Why? It is because the pattern for the church does not change—the Word of God. However, the decision makers in the local church can—and should—benefit from the finest thinking available as to how best to arrive at those decisions. “And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Luke 16:8). Since “decision making is one of the principal processes engaged in by individuals, groups, and organizations,”<sup>18</sup> and since the Lord’s work is the most important on earth, we should make it our urgent business to learn about the finest techniques of decision making available.

Most of the trauma that accompanies assessing risks and handling fears results from either the inability or the reluctance of leaders to reach decisions. Therefore, becoming an adept decision maker in the presence of risk and fear is a leadership skill of high priority.<sup>19</sup>

An understanding of the decision-making process is critical not only for the explanation of individual behavior but also for the behavior of complex organizations.<sup>20</sup>

The solving of problems and the making of decisions are similar in both individuals and organizations; however, these processes in organizations, such as the local congregation, also involve interactions between and among people. They are both “intrapersonal and interpersonal.”<sup>21</sup>

### Choosing Among Alternatives

Inasmuch as decision making may be defined as choosing among alternatives, the three elements of a decision are: (1) choice, (2) two or more alternatives, and (3) the motives and goals to be accomplished. Every decision should be made with the long-range, ultimate goals in view.

For any system (including the Lord’s church), “the identification of goals is...a first and essential element of managerial decision-making.”<sup>22</sup> It is critical that the members of the organization understand and be a part of the goals. “Motivation and self-control generally involve the integration of human needs with organizational goals. The identification and development of goals, then, is the common

thread that seems to tie them all together.”<sup>23</sup> Of course, the Lord in His Word establishes and lays out the purpose and work of the local congregation. “Once specific overall goals have been established, the step-by-step process of translating them into required action throughout the organization begins.”<sup>24</sup> Involved in these activities may be the setting of intermediate objectives, leading to the overall goals. Strategic plans can then be set up to accomplish those objectives.<sup>25</sup>

A **goal** is a desired future condition. It reflects a statement of intent, something to shoot for. Its time-frame tends to be long-range, as distinguished from that of a short-term **target**, perhaps three to five years and longer. Goals tend to be broad in focus, though specific enough to provide direction and thrust.<sup>26</sup>

Some break down their goals and goal setting, from emergency action being called for “right now,” to those goals even decades down the road. McLean and Weitzel differentiate them thus: “Urgent (now), Short-term (twelve months), Medium-term (two to four years), Long-term (five years or more).”<sup>27</sup> The astute planner realizes that the further off the goal(s), the more hypothetical they become; however, to neglect or abandon altogether the making of long-range goals could threaten the future mission of the organization and even, in some cases perhaps, its very existence. A very real benefit of long-range goals is that of continuity, consistency, and persistence.<sup>28</sup> Churchman observed,

The relationship between goal setting and identification of long-range objectives is important. Evidently for most organizations there will be a large proliferation of goals. The purpose of setting the long-range objectives is to put the short-range goals into their proper perspective, i.e., to determine which are the most important goals. As a consequence, the long-range objectives themselves need to be stated in a fairly specific manner, else their relationship to the goals becomes lost and their role as an integrating function becomes meaningless.<sup>29</sup>

Now, how does leadership relate to an organization (in this case the local church) reaching its goal(s)?

Management is the dynamic force which converts human and nonhuman resources into organizations. It is a process which integrates previously unrelated resources into something that is greater than the mere sum of its parts. While the purpose of management is to coordinate the activities of people in organizations, its overall role is to facilitate the effective and efficient attainment of organizational goals and the personal needs of its members.<sup>30</sup>

Good and valid decisions are dependent upon information: timely, adequate, applicable information. “Most decisions are made on the basis of detailed information and research. Considerable staff work must be done before a sound decision can be made.”<sup>31</sup> High quality decisions depend upon “the extent to which the leader [leaders] possesses sufficient information/expertise.” That information, Vroom observes, needs to be of two types, as problems are solved in organizations. “One is information necessary to the task of evaluating the relative quality or rationality of different alternatives. The other is information concerning the preferences of subordinates and their feelings about the alternatives.”<sup>32</sup> Very often, much related expertise is available from certain members within a congregation from whom the elders may wish to seek input in making decisions in various areas. This information source should not be overlooked.<sup>33</sup>

### Difficulty of Decision Making

The making of decisions, as everyone knows from personal experience, is a burdensome task. Offsetting the exhilaration that may result from correct and successful decision and the relief that follows the terminating of a struggle to determine issues is the depression that comes from failure or error of decision and the frustration which ensues from uncertainty. Accordingly, it will be observed that men generally try to avoid making decisions, beyond a limited degree when they are rather uncritical responses to conditions. The capacity of most men to make decisions is quite narrow, although it is a capacity that may be developed by training and especially by experience.<sup>34</sup>

But, the eldership **must** make decisions, often very critical, life and death decisions spiritually, relating to people’s souls and, indeed, the spiritual welfare of the whole congregation.

A decision is evaluated as to its consequences—did it help to alleviate the problem and/or help the congregation achieve its objectives? Not all results can be fathomed when decisions are made. Further, some decisions are profitable now but not later, whereas some seemingly bad decisions now may eventually end up being good. Risks are involved in decision making; not all outcomes can be forecasted. The more widespread the influence of the decision, the greater the risk. And the less information available relative to the outcome of each alternative, the greater the risk.

### The Alternatives Themselves

Once a goal, or hierarchy of goals has been established, the decision maker [makers] prepares a repertory of alternatives for achieving his [their] aims. For any given alternative, and there may be an infinite range of possibilities, is associated a decision system composed of an outcome, a probability, and a value.<sup>35</sup>

The decision makers attempt to forecast what will be the probable outcome of each alternative, if possible. In other words, which of the alternatives is most nearly likely to accomplish the desired goal or resolve the targeted problem? How much risk is involved with each alternative? Sometimes it is easy to determine all the possible ways to accomplish an objective or goal; at other times, it is not so easy. And, if there are time constraints in making the necessary decisions and adequate information cannot be gathered for decision making, the process can be especially frustrating and tenuous.<sup>36</sup>

With increased risk comes increased fear. Uncertainty increases fear. Decision makers should weigh high risks against the reward. McLean and Weitzel illustrate the principle thus:

What happens so often is that the very presence of risk produces a rigidity in otherwise normal faculties. Few among us would be unable to walk a one-foot plank of wood, twenty feet long, lying on flat ground. But raise it twenty feet off the ground, and most people become petrified at the thought of such a walk. Why is this so?

With the plank twenty feet off the ground, the decision is a relatively easy one for two basic reasons: the reward for doing so is low, and considering the fear factor, the risk of doing so is relatively high. This example provides the direction for taking our first step toward confronting and effectively handling risk in our daily lives.<sup>37</sup>

Various fears that produce insecurity in confronting risks include “fear of failure, fear of embarrassment, fear of disappointing others, fear of resentment.” Sometimes, if the reward is great enough, we need to face our fears and try to reduce or eliminate them altogether. Deal with each fear one at a time, casting away the empty ones and allowing the valid ones to help make a better decision, perhaps a more conservative one.<sup>38</sup>

McLean and Weitzel recommend that decision makers adopt what they call a “No-Lose Mentality.”

Plain logic tells us there are three principal ways of reacting to problems: You can attack, retreat, or stand pat. Any one of these three choices may be right for a given situation. But leaders who invariably make the same choice

each time are stuck in a rut that will get them nowhere....consider all three avenues as open each time a decision is made.<sup>39</sup>

They emphasize that “one’s mental frame of mind has a strong influence on how a choice is made.” Often, decision makers can get the alternations down to two in number, both of which will help move the organization toward its goal.

Notice that two paths lie ahead—A and B—both of which are right!... Each yields nothing but benefits...clearly a no-lose situation...despite the outcome.... There are those who really think this way—and their approach to life is a joy to be around.<sup>40</sup>

When one goes back and thinks about the decision, “what might have appeared to be a loss is really a new opportunity to make adjustments and set up new dynamics for winning.”<sup>41</sup>

They also suggest another way to cope with a fear provoking, risky decision, which they term “The Dual Decision.”

Where risk and fear are concerned there are really two decisions to make, and the first is almost useless without the second. Indeed, for best results, the decisions must be made simultaneously. Here is the pattern of the dual decision:

1. To make the basic decision on time
2. To get ready to cope with unexpected problems.

Failures, duly recognized, can be good friends and wonderful teachers. Even fear of failure can be a powerful motivator for those who are prepared to make the adjustments necessary to cope with unexpected problems. (Coping can mean either solving or adapting to such problems.)<sup>42</sup>

Quoting Peter Drucker, they wrote that

a decision is “rarely a choice between right and wrong...it is at best a choice between ‘almost right’ and ‘probably wrong’...but, much more often, a choice between two courses of action neither of which is probably more nearly right than the other.”<sup>43</sup>

Very often, it is the case that “few big decisions are made by acclamation [total unanimity] on the part of those most interested in the outcome.”

In fact, the man who built General Motors, Alfred P. Sloan, is reported to have said at a meeting of one of his top committees: “Gentlemen, I take it we are all in complete agreement on this decision.” Everyone around the table nodded assent. “Then,” he continued, “I propose we postpone further discussion on this matter until our next meeting to give ourselves time to develop disagreement and thereby gain some understanding of what our decision is really all about.”<sup>44</sup>

It has been observed that “the Chinese word for danger is spelled the same, except for one character, as the Chinese word for opportunity.”<sup>45</sup> Very often, even after we have attempted to forecast possible outcomes of each alternative considered in accomplishing a task or in solving a problem, there remains a high degree of uncertainty. We must use our best collective judgment. To collect as much information as possible relieves some distress and risk; yet, we need to anticipate possible unfortunate consequences and be as nearly prepared as possible to deal with them. “A decision maker may never ‘cross the dotted line’ to either certainty or risk states regardless of how much information he requires.”<sup>46</sup> We do our best to develop “scenarios” of what might take place as various decisions are made.<sup>47</sup>

### **Ideal Conditions for Decisions**

Conditions that are ideal for decision making by elders include the following: (1) The goals and their relationship to the decision problem are understood. (2) The problem has been fully, precisely, and accurately understood. (3) Every feasible, reasonable alternative is understood fully, along with understanding the consequences of each alternative. (4) The consequences of each alternative can be related to the goals of the congregation. (5) The decision makers are free to choose and to implement fully the best alternative. Inasmuch as these conditions are rarely, if ever, fully present, the optimum solution is sought.

### **The Process of Decision Making**

The process of decision making should proceed generally as follows. First, the problem or task is recognized and defined. Second, the problem/task is analyzed and examined. Third, criteria are formulated whereby a possible solution to the problem/task will be either accepted or rejected; that is, does it meet or solve the problem/task? Fourth, the data are collected. Fifth, possible alternatives are formulated, and the preferred solution(s) is chosen. Sixth, the chosen alternative, or possible solution to the problem/task, is implemented, with accompanying evaluation techniques also implemented. This is the overall plan, which may also include certain control mechanisms, information feedback, et al.

## INFLUENCES WHICH IMPACT THE DECISION-MAKING FUNCTION

The role of elders as decision makers naturally affects the congregation. Thus, they must control the function of decision making. Decisions may: (1) bring about an **adjustment** in the present course of the congregation; (2) **correct** a present course of action; or (3) permit the course presently pursued to **continue**. “**Change**” is always threatening to the people involved; so the elders need to realize that the greater the change, the greater the degree of unsettled, unsure feeling among the members. The elders must realize that changes are made and goals are reached by directing individuals and groups within the congregation toward the desired goals.

The task of moving the congregation toward certain goals involves: (1) articulating the goals and objectives—the task is to bring into congruency the goals of individual Christians with the goals of the congregation; (2) delegating authority in assigned areas of responsibility; (3) having adequate feedback—information and evaluation input—to determine how the congregation is moving in relationship to its goals. The membership should be kept informed relative to the relationship of the decisions to the goals and relative to the importance of each person’s contribution to the congregation’s progress. Elders should also provide for receiving input from the membership, a necessary area of communication to building credibility and confidence.

Decisions are affected, or impacted, by the following dimensions. (1) If time is short, the number of alternatives which can be considered is reduced, as well as the information which can be available to influence the decision. (2) The personalities and/or abilities of people involved must be taken into consideration. (3) The number of people influenced by the decision can increase implications and pressure. (4) The quality and/or quantity of information available can affect decisions. (5) Decisions must be congruent with the demands and constraints of the Word of God. (6) Decisions which call forth a number of possible, workable alternatives increase the likelihood of making good decisions. (7) Decisions which would place constraints on future decisions should not be made, if avoidable. (8) The extent to which the members can be rallied behind major decisions can affect the process.

The administrative process includes the following basic elements or activities. One, **plans** must be made for the organism (congregation) to move toward accomplishing its purpose(s). Two, **work** must be **organized** and **coordinated**. Three, **personnel** should be placed in suitable areas of responsibility and service; **training** should be made available, if needed. Four, the overall program should be **directed**, which includes decision making, instruction, and feedback. Five, the various areas of responsibility and service should be **coordinated** and interrelated. Six, the progress and/or developments should be **reported** to decision-makers; they should be kept informed. Seven, the overall matter of **budgeting**, including budget plans, accounting, and control, are an integral part of administrative process.

Some conflicts may arise in the process of making decisions. Such can result from uncertainty, risk-taking, unclear goals, inadequate information, differences in personalities. However, elders should be mature and Christian in their demeanor at all times; otherwise, their credibility is lost, and the cause is injured. The most likely time of conflict will occur during the process **leading to** the decision, rather than at the time of the decision or at the implementation stage. Elders must be united in the decision and the implementation stage, purposefully moving the congregation to reach the goal. Conflict can destroy growth; it keeps leaders from making decisions, it causes bad feelings about the decision, it crushes excitement, and it prevents purposeful activity. Let us dwell in unity, brethren! In decision making, not all conflict is bad, if handled correctly; it can increase effectiveness and efficiency.

## CONCLUSION

Space does not permit discussion of formal and informal groups, the communicative process, isolation within the congregation and how to alleviate it, goal-setting procedures, leadership types, motivation necessary to implementation, bringing congruence between goals of the congregation and individual goals. Hopefully, this brief introduction will enhance the decision making role of elders, because the welfare of countless precious souls depends upon their decisions—including their own!

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>C. West Churchman, *The Systems Approach* (New York, NY: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1968), p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>J. W. McLean and William Weitzel, *Leadership—Magic, Myth, or Method?* (New York, NY: American Management Association, 1991), p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>Gary A. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>See the chapter by Bobby Duncan in this volume entitled “Authority of Elders”; see also Curtis A. Cates, “The Authority of Elders,” in Cliff Lyons, ed., *Hebrews 11 and Current Issues Facing the Church* (Muskogee, OK: Eastside Church of Christ; 1989), pp. 64-73.

<sup>7</sup>Victor H. Vroom and Philip W. Yetton, *Leadership and Decision-Making* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>Yukl, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup>McLean and Weitzel, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>12</sup>Vroom and Yetton, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>Anthony P. Raia, *Managing by Objectives* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1974), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 185.

<sup>17</sup>Claude S. George, Jr., *The History of Management Thought* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), pp. 185-186.

<sup>18</sup>William G. Scott and Terence R. Mitchell, *Organizational Theory: A Structural and Behavioral Analysis* (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., and The Dorsey Press, 1972), p. 165.

<sup>19</sup>McLean and Weitzel, p. 159.

<sup>20</sup>Vroom and Yetton, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>22</sup>Raia, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 18, 22.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup>McLean and Weitzel, p. 109.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Churchman, p. 166.

<sup>30</sup>Raia, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup>American Association of School Administrators, *Profilers of the Administrative Team* (Washington, DC: AASA, 1971), p. 42.

<sup>32</sup>Vroom, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>34</sup>Barnard, pp. 189-190.

<sup>35</sup>Scott and Mitchell, p. 167.

<sup>36</sup>Churchman, pp. 163-165.

<sup>37</sup>McLean and Weitzel, pp. 159-160.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>46</sup>Scott, pp. 169-171.

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# GOAL SETTING IN LEADERSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

In the television series *Family Ties* there was an episode in which the parents discovered that their oldest daughter was failing a history class and might not graduate from high school. Her mother was visibly upset and rebuked her by asking, “Mallory, how did you expect to pass—by going to the mall four nights a week, dating Nick [her boyfriend], and talking on the telephone for hours at a time?” With a completely serious and deadpan expression, Mallory replies, “Okay, so that didn’t work.”

The humor in the above scene lies in its absurdity. Whether consciously or subconsciously, we say to ourselves, “How could anyone hope to achieve anything (such as passing a history course) without some plan to bring about the desired effect?” Nothing worthwhile is accomplished haphazardly. We all recognize this fundamental truth—without goals success is not possible. This philosophy governs people whether they are striving for Olympic gold or endeavoring to lose weight.

Yet do leaders in the church possess this attitude? Let’s eavesdrop on a typical business meeting. “Thank you for reading the minutes of the last meeting, brother Jones. John, did you have a chance to check out insurance premiums on the building from other companies?”

“Well, I haven’t heard back from all the companies yet” (which is true because he only remembered to make the phone calls three days before this meeting).

“That’s okay; bring them next month. Bill, did you find out how much it would cost to print up fliers for our gospel meeting?” A fifteen-minute discussion ensues on the price offered, after which one brother mentions that he has a third cousin who knows somebody in a town 70 miles away who is quite economical (translate “cheap”).

“That’ll work. Well, now. Is there any new business? Okay. Looks like we’ll have a short meeting today. Oh, I nearly forgot. Sister Smith says her classroom needs painting real bad.”

One of the men says he could do a bad job of painting it. After a few chuckles, about fifteen minutes is consumed trying to figure out who has the best price on paint, who makes the best paint, and who has the most time available to pick up the paint. Since there is no other new business, the meeting is concluded with prayer, in which God is thanked that we are so privileged to be a part of the church and had this opportunity to discuss “the affairs of the kingdom.”

Does the above scenario sound even remotely familiar? It may be somewhat of an exaggeration, but unfortunately meetings like these are all too common. The reason is that many congregations have no overall plan and no specific goals. Thus a spur-of-the-moment, troubleshooting approach to matters is taken; whatever we must deal with receives attention—all other problems will be postponed to a later time. This “mop-up” philosophy is based upon the premise that our main goal is “taking care of business”; there is little room (or time) in it to make positive spiritual plans for the future.

Suppose elders or “the men of the congregation” (in churches that have no elders) were told by our heavenly Principal that they were failing in their “Leadership” course and that it was their fault that the church was not growing. The Lord might justly rebuke us: “How did you expect to succeed—by frittering away your time in meetings, by staying home and watching television four nights a week, by spending hours at a time engaged in various hobbies while the work of the church remains undone?” Will we all with one accord, like Mallory, reply, “Okay, so that didn’t work”? This time around the conversation is not so amusing.

## EVIDENCES OF DEFICIENCY

If congregations are not growing and serving God as they should, there is a bottleneck somewhere. As one astute individual observed a few years ago, “Every bottleneck that I have ever seen was right at the top of the bottle.”<sup>1</sup> As others have noted, “A congregation seldom rises above its leadership.”

What is the evidence that leaders, by and large, are failing? The present apostasy, which has carried away so many churches, is a clear indication that in many congregations elders have not fed the flock; in fact, many of these shepherds are themselves obviously spiritually malnourished, or the numerous departures which have occurred would not have happened.

A second sign of inadequate leadership is that many churches have ceased to exist in the past decade; others remain on the verge of collapse. Although there can be legitimate reasons for such situations (such as a military base closing or the bulk of a town’s population moving away to find jobs), the usual reason is that the members have not been evangelistic. As the elderly pass on, there is no one to replace them. The old adage of “grow or die” certainly applies in these instances. Generally speaking, people no longer flock in just because we have a building. They must be converted by Christians. It is particularly tragic when our own young people slip through our fingers—perhaps because they have not seen the church as a whole or its members in particular living by faith.

A third evidence of leadership failure is that we are not growing. Even discounting for the moment those congregations that have dwindled or already disappeared, many of those remaining could scarcely be considered vibrantly strong. Many of these are barely holding their own; how many “faithful” churches have increased significantly in the last five years? Truly, we have a need for “leadership” to be discussed in general and “goal setting” in particular, because our negligence in analyzing, evaluating, and planning may very well be the reason we are in our current unenviable position.

### **“NOTHING...WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE”**

Some might protest that a lack of growth cannot always be attributed to our shortcomings. After all, there is a great lack of interest on the part of people to hear the gospel due to the fact that we live in a

very materialistic world with manifold diversions available. That is a point, but it would carry a bigger wallop if it were not the case that many denominational churches and cults are growing; people are interested in religion. Now someone will answer, “Yes, but they are not interested in the truth.” This observation likewise has some merit, but before we write everyone off, we might ask, “Have they first heard the truth and then rejected it?” Or in the absence of the truth (which we have neglected to take to people), have they merely settled on an inferior substitute? Are we not allowing those who dispense error to out-hustle us?

The ultimate excuse to which we resort is: “But Jesus said that only few would be saved” (Mat. 7:13-14). All right, there are in excess of five billion souls on the earth at this time. If there were as many as five million Christians worldwide (an exceedingly generous estimate), only one person in one thousand would be a child of God. That translates to 0.1% of the population. Brethren, Jesus said those being saved were few—not minuscule. We would have to grow to ten times our size (probably twenty times would be more accurate) just to comprise 1% of the population, let alone 10%, which would still constitute “few”!

But is it fair to set the blame at the doorstep of our leaders? Yes, and it is time that we repented and began making full use of our abilities. We stand guilty of refusing either to set goals or to follow through on them. Such a broad statement can be made because those who are devoted to a cause, who have a purpose and goals, will succeed way beyond the position where we currently find ourselves. Whatever we set our sights on we can accomplish; there is nothing that will be impossible for us.

Is there too much Robert Schuller in that last sentence? Ah, but he is not the author of that one; God is. As he assessed the situation at Babel, He said, “Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do” (Gen. 11:6). The *Torah* reads: “Nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach.” *The Modern Language Bible* says: “Nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.”

God’s assessment of these people’s ability to accomplish their goal is based primarily on one qualifying factor—their unity. If we possess

unity (which certainly ought to characterize the church), we ought to be able to succeed, also. The only other ingredient these people had that we do not have is a goal. They **imagined** what they wanted to do; they had a **plan**; there was a **proposal**. If we do not succeed today, the reason is clear—we lack vision and unity. It might be correctly pointed out that this civilization was in the process of violating God's plan to "fill the earth." Such an observation hardly works against the principle enunciated above; if anything, it strengthens it. If God had not intervened, nothing would have restrained them. Since unspiritual men with an evil intent can succeed in their clearly-defined aims, how much more successful ought those abiding in Christ to be (John 15:1-8), who are working to accomplish His goals!

### GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MANKIND

Are leaders authorized to have goals? In the next section, it will be shown that God has set some goals for the church; but first we will notice that God Himself is the example of a goal-setter. Consider carefully the following Scriptures:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Mat. 25:34).

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain (Acts 2:23).

For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:27-28).

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:7-8).

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph. 1:4-5).

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).

Is it not obvious that God had a plan? From passages like these the following conclusions may be drawn. (1) When mankind sinned, God was not surprised; neither was He unprepared to deal with it. (2) He had already determined to send Jesus to be crucified by men with wicked hands, who had no idea they were fulfilling God's plan (see also John 11:49-52). In fact, Jesus was slain "from the foundation of the world." (3) God determined to adopt those who choose to be His and prepared for them the church (compare Eph. 1:4-5 with 3:1-7 and 5:26-27). (4) There is also an eternal kingdom that God purposed for His children.

Concerning Acts 2:23, *The Pulpit Commentary* says: "God's counsel, that Christ should suffer for sins, was not a vague, indistinct purpose, leaving much to accident and the fluctuating will of man; it was determinate and defined in respect of time and manner and the instruments for carrying it out."<sup>2</sup> In other words, God devised the great scheme of redemption for mankind—and then brought it about in "the fulness of the time" (Gal. 4:4).

Jesus likewise had goals when He departed heaven for a lower realm. First and foremost He came to accomplish the salvation of mankind, as discussed above. His very name means "Savior," and He came to save those who were lost in their sins (Mat. 1:21; Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15). He also came into the world to bear witness unto the truth (John 18:37) and to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

The student of the Word also realizes that all of the faithful followers of God have also been men with Divine aims in mind. Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God" (Heb. 11:10); Moses had his eye on the "recompense of reward" (Heb. 11:26); Paul's goal was to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phi. 3:14). These constitute just a small sampling of biblical heroes imitating the example that God set of having goals.

### **GOD'S GOALS FOR THE CHURCH**

Leaders in the Lord's church need not spend a great deal of time setting general goals for the congregation; the Lord has already done so. There are at least four that the Scriptures emphasize. The first one

is **EVANGELISM**. Jesus established this priority before ascending into heaven. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mat. 28:19). This will remain the primary purpose of the church until the Lord returns. Preaching the gospel to the lost throughout the entire world may seem like a great undertaking, but the enormity of the task for us is no greater than for our first century counterparts. Can we succeed? Remember that even of those pursuing evil ends God said “nothing...will be impossible.” We also have the promise of our Lord to be with us (Mat. 28:20).

We could fulfill this commandment **if** enough leaders would meet to formulate a plan and cooperate in its implementation. The Internet may help spread the gospel, but we dare not depend on that alone. There is a way to evangelize the world, or Jesus would not have made it mandatory. Many individuals (and churches, also) need to restore the urgency of this divine dictum. The world would be turned upside down again if Paul’s attitude proved contagious and brethren became infected. “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22b).

The second general goal the Lord gave the church is **EDIFICATION**. This concept would be included in “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mat. 28:20) and a number of other passages (Acts 2:42; Acts 14:22; Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 2:2). In fact, it is the specific duty of elders to “feed the flock of God” (1 Pet. 5:2). Many congregations have not devoted themselves to making sure that “the whole counsel of God” is presented; some may still be using educational materials which have been published to accommodate various denominations as well as us. How distinctive can such curricula be? Attention should be devoted to it until a qualitative spiritual education awaits every adult and child who attends the Bible school. Jesus promised to be with us when we apply ourselves to this goal, too (Mat. 29:20).

A third area of emphasis is **BENEVOLENCE**. Generosity as a way of life in the first century church appears to have been almost automatic. Immediately, “all that believed were together, and had all things common” (Acts 2:44); shortly thereafter no brother said that “ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32b). This spirit of good will did not cease,

but decades later many brethren were setting aside contributions for the poor in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:1-5; 2 Cor. 9:1-13).

Admittedly, it is difficult in such a prosperous nation as America for Christians to practice benevolence on one another. And when calls have come forth from Africa and India, many of us have responded quickly. But surely there must be a more active way of helping than just waiting for the next disaster to strike. How many of us have devoted ourselves to developing a dynamic benevolence program? Have we not said instead, "Let the government take care of it"? (Actually, big government's social programs have robbed the church of opportunities we once had.) Regardless of what anyone else does or doesn't do, the church has responsibilities in this area of work.

A fourth goal that the church has been furnished is to **EARN-ESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH** (Jude 3-4). There "shall be [notice: not "might be"] false teachers" among us (2 Pet. 2:1), and such men must be marked (Rom. 16:17-18). Otherwise, they will "overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:18), and "many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Pet. 2:2).

Some congregations obviously do not have "contending" as a goal. They either sport a false teacher of their own (and seem proud of it), or they cannot bring themselves to think that anyone could be that insincere. A pious appearance has disguised many a wolf (2 Cor. 11:13-15). One wonders if some shepherds, sopped and saturated with superficial sweetness, would even admit that Satan himself is a liar and deceives people. And if they were to admit it, would they take a public stand against him?

God set "contending for the faith" as a goal before us, along with evangelism, edification, and benevolence. If church leaders are not giving serious consideration to the accomplishment of these four general purposes, then failure and defeat await us.

### **SPECIFIC GOALS AND MEANS OF ACCOMPLISHMENT**

Every congregation must determine how to best implement these four general goals in its community (and then beyond that limited sphere of influence). The first step in the process is **EVALUATION**. J. J. Turner, in his book *Leadership and Church Growth*, discusses the importance of making an honest self-appraisal. Some of the questions leaders need to ask are: "Where do we presently stand?"; "What are

our assets and liabilities?"; "Are we motivated?"; "What are our present goals?"; "Is there a spirit of cooperation?"<sup>3</sup> Another question to throw into the mix is: "How closely do our current goals match the ones that God has given to us?" If our only goals are to pay the bills and maintain the status quo, we are woefully lacking in our responsibilities.

The next step would be to recognize the four objectives that God has given the church and **SET GOALS** in harmony with them. Brother Turner then emphasizes making a plan to fulfill each individual aim. A plan must be devised that includes **THE MEANS TO ACHIEVE IT** (how will it be done?). Since good intentions are frequently shelved indefinitely, deadlines must be assigned. Obstacles, as well as appropriate detours around them, should be anticipated.<sup>4</sup>

These may seem like mere common-sense suggestions, but it is incredible how seldom these simple steps are followed. We are frequently too casual in our approach to the crucial work of the church, as if we had all the time in the world. Months, not to mention years, can drag by without any evaluation of the church's current situation, without setting any goals, and without noting that we have actually accomplished something worthwhile.

In an assignment for the Annual Denton Lectures, Roy Deaver did an excellent analysis of Nehemiah as a leader, listing 22 qualities of this great man. His fifth and tenth points correspond to those made above. "Before taking action, he carefully surveyed the situation, gathered the facts, studied the facts, made the plans" (Neh. 2:11-15).<sup>5</sup> "He carefully systematized the work to be done" (Neh. 3).<sup>6</sup> These principles are crucial if the church is to be successful; every step is vital. They are worth repeating.

1. Evaluate honestly the congregation's current situation.
2. Recognize the challenges that God has set before us.
3. Detail the means by which these objectives are going to be met at the local level (and even further, if possible, by means of the Internet, a teaching bulletin, a magazine, tapes, radio, television, correspondence courses, or other helpful ideas).
4. Work the plan, meeting the assigned deadlines.
5. Re-evaluate periodically, and begin the process again.

## THE ELEMENT OF FAITH

Deaver's thirteenth observation about Nehemiah contains this essential insight: "He realized and stressed that he and the people were instruments in the hand of God."<sup>7</sup> He cites as evidence of this fact Nehemiah's words: "our God shall fight for us" (Neh. 4:20). It is a fundamental fact of all history: Those who trust in God and live by faith succeed mightily; others just subsist (or worse).

God's observation at the tower of Babel was not merely a hyperbole. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews attests to what has been accomplished by men and women of faith. Perhaps in addition to lackluster leadership in many congregations there is a shortage of deep and abiding faith. Nehemiah took upon himself an enormous challenge—one fraught with many obstacles, but he was a man with faith and vision. He could envision the walls of Jerusalem being rebuilt and protecting the city. His faith was strong: he knew the people could not in any way match the opposing forces; he also recognized that God could.

Joshua was another man of faith. He received multiple assurances that God would be with him as he led Israel in conquering the land that God had given to them (Jos. 1:5-9). At the close of the southern conquest of the peoples in the land, we learn that God did not disappoint Joshua in all of his endeavors. "And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel" (Jos. 10:42).

Other men of faith have not been slow to respond to the work assigned them due to their strong trust in God. David informed the Philistine: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied" (1 Sam. 17:45). After Abijah reminded Jeroboam of the ways they had departed from God, he added: "But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him" (2 Chr. 13:10). In exhorting the Israelites to be courageous against Assyria, Hezekiah pointed out: "With him *is* an arm of flesh; but with us *is* the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chr. 32:8a).

We have God-given goals to accomplish; they too require faith, the kind possessed by our spiritual forefathers. If history is any indication, God will neither desert nor forsake us. Many think that it was

Jesus who was the “captain of the host of the Lord” (Jos. 5:14).<sup>8</sup> If so, He has already fought for His people before; how much more will He fight for the army of God today—as we are actively engaged in the great works He has given us to do (Mat. 28:20).

### CONCLUSION

What more motivation can God’s people require to be “about the Father’s business”?! The work is exciting and enjoyable; the rewards are enormous and eternal. Let urgency permeate every congregation of God’s people on earth. Let us move forward and conquer all the enemies that lie in the way—from legalism to liberalism, from literalism to deconstructionism, from lethargy to zeal without knowledge. As Joshua and Caleb told Israel about the peoples of Canaan: “they *are* bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD *is* with us: fear them not” (Num. 14:9). These two men were exactly right, but sadly they would be forced to wait forty years to experience the truth of the exhortation because the people lacked **FAITH** (Heb. 4:1-2; Jude 5).

Although Solomon was writing about a person’s keeping his heart with all diligence and living a holy life, the means to accomplish that individual aim would be equally applicable to the goals that the church must accomplish: “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil” (Pro. 4:25-27). And remember: “Nothing...will be impossible.”

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., *Church Leadership and Organization* (Arvada, CO: Christian Communications, 1980), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>A. C. Hervey, *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 18:1:52.

<sup>3</sup>J. J. Turner, *Leadership and Church Growth* (Shreveport, LA: Lambert Book House, 1976), p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Roy Deaver, “Nehemiah—A Study in Real Leadership,” in *Studies in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1992), p. 386.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 387.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>8</sup>J. J. Lias, *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 3:2:90-92.

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# CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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## INTRODUCTION

God made us social creatures (Gen. 2:18-24). Any time there are two people, there are interpersonal relationships and, therefore, possibilities of conflicts. Adam and Eve disagreed over the reasons for their sins (Gen. 3:12-13). Cain held so much hatred for Abel that he murdered him (Gen. 4:8). Moses insisted that the population of Noah's time were a people "filled with violence" (Gen. 6:13). Abram anticipated strife between his herdsmen and Lot's and between himself and Lot (Gen. 13:7-8). Family disputes and wars are a large part of Old Testament history.

The New Testament record is not much better! Jesus' disciples disputed among themselves (Mark 9:34). Annanias and Sapphira entered into a self-constructed conflict with apostolic authority (Acts 5:1ff); the Jews resented the Gentiles (Rom. 1-3); and the early brethren fought over doctrine (Rom. 16:17; Acts 15; et al).

Conflict is neither condoned nor overlooked by the writers of Holy Writ. "He that hideth hatred *with* lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, *is* a fool. In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips *is* wise" (Pro. 10:18-19). "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Pro. 15:1). "A

perverse man scattereth abroad strife; And a whisperer separateth chief friends” (Pro. 16:28). “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth *very* friends” (Pro. 17:9). The foregoing verses are but a brief sample of the Bible writers’ concerns for good human relationships. This brief essay will define “conflict,” set forth Bible mandates for resolving conflict, and offer some practical solutions when human relationships sour.

### CONFLICT “DEFINED”

Conflict has been labeled one of the most pervasive and confounding of all human activities.<sup>1</sup> Conflict is a struggle that occurs when “two or more people have goals which appear to be incompatible.”<sup>2</sup> The **competition** between the two supposed incompatibilities (or better, the **opposing actions**) usually results in an antagonistic state. There exist, then, the possibilities of divergent interests, ideas, or persons.

Some conflict is a mental struggle resulting from unresolved, opposing needs, drives, wishes, and even external or internal demands. The extreme of such is war, collision, battle, or hostile encounter. Some persons, it is thought, even develop unique conflict styles which become rigid and further the hostility.<sup>3</sup> Such “styles” include: getting quieter; shouting; frequent interruption; intimidation (attack); ignoring; manipulation; avoidance; deception; talking behind the scenes; “open” discussion. (Those who have been present at men’s business meetings for the congregation may recognize one or more of the former “styles.”)

Real issues of doctrinal differences are **not** to be defined as “conflict” in the sense being investigated here. It is possible, however, to create an atmosphere of hostility such that real issues cannot be discussed. An illustration of how proper discussion can be killed comes from a story a preacher told—the men of the congregation were called together to discuss a long range ministry plan. The preacher asked each one present to set forth his thoughts concerning the on-going work of the church and how he would like to see development over the next five years. The third speaker, an older businessman, brusquely stated, “One of our problems is that there is just no power in the preaching.” The meeting suddenly resembled a tomb, and the preacher felt as if he had been slapped. The gathering evolved from

warm expectations to a chilling crisis!<sup>4</sup> Conflict occurs this way thousands of times in church and home!

There are reasons for disagreements and no one can insure the absence of conflicts (Mat. 10:34). Eliminating all conflict, in fact, could be harmful, for the testing of faith and persons induces growth (Jam. 1:2-10). But, healthy growth and escalating hostility are not twins; the latter is a failure to recognize some of the sources of conflict and to deal with them. Several reasons for conflict are:<sup>5</sup>

1. There are generational differences that manifest themselves in younger members becoming tired of “traditions” and older members who “remember how it was” and “who paid the price to get here.” Suggestions as to *method* from either group are often mistaken as criticisms of the other’s experiences. Understanding and **respect** can diffuse such conflicts (1 Tim. 5:1-3). One needs not evaluate someone else’s actions on one’s own perspective alone. One needs to try to understand **why** people feel as they do.

2. Differences in what is allowed in expediting biblical commands are often major contributors to conflict. (For example, is it right to spend large sums of money on local efforts while the world goes hungry and is lost?) Such theological concerns affect Christians (Rom. 14:1-23). These differences of application are real, and the solution involves cultivating an atmosphere of freedom where such differences can be discussed without fear of threat or hurt. Two things are necessary to such freedom: (a) Brethren must understand where final authority rests in expediting matters (i.e., with the elders). (b) The differences must not be paraded around the congregation through gossip or rumor.

3. Most conflicts are communication problems. Christians often define terms differently and then engage in what logicians call verbal disputes. The new preacher often has wonderful ideas for his new work. A new committee member burns with plans as he envisions what can be done. Meanwhile, the new preacher is having a hard time reconciling his ideas with “visiting the neighborhood,” and the committee member wonders why he is cleaning the kitchen or something! **Honesty** is the key here. What is really expected of someone should be plainly, even bluntly, stated. Elders often fail here to provide proper, clear job descriptions written out for the preacher, teacher, or

committee member. The sending of right information can win a war and dilute a disagreement.

4. Leaders must know their people and learn to recognize the **perspective** from which a person speaks. (Compare referees who call plays differently because of what they saw from their position.) One needs to ask how a decision for a congregation will affect all. One is not to “Lord it over” God’s church (1 Pet. 5:1-6).

5. Some folks cannot seem to do anything except to major in minors; they are most often concerned with who has the power. So what if “my ideas” are not the ones most often adopted? Is not each Christian’s responsibility to esteem others better (Phi. 2:3-4)? A good test to see whether one is majoring in minors is to determine what causes frustration. Is the matter simply some method “at church” or is it over real problems with real people? If the former, one is most often majoring in minors.

6. The attitudes of elders, preachers, teachers, or anyone in a position of leadership are crucial to avoidance of conflict. A preacher made a bulls-eye chart to display the results of a survey he conducted. The congregation’s members had been asked concerning to whom they would go if they had a personal problem. Not one of the elders’ names could be found on the chart anywhere near the center! When the elders in the foregoing congregation were questioned as to their reasons or positions on any matter, the elders most often reacted by challenging the member’s faithfulness. No wonder no one wanted to communicate with such elders. The church cannot be operated like a business; it is made up of the weak, the strong, and the stronger (1 John 2:12-14). Compassion is essential to cooperation in a church.

7. Too many congregations are more like high-school reunions rather than family reunions. There is so little relationship that conflict occurs over many petty matters. Do the following statements sound familiar: (a) I have never been invited to my preacher’s house. (b) I can not remember our last pot-luck. (c) We never get together except for church business. (d) I don’t know one-half of the people at church? Key to resolving most church conflicts is family affection (Rom. 12:10). Respect, understanding, freedom, submission, deference, honesty, and openness are family traits much needed for a congregation’s health. Relations based solely on organization force one into an agree-disagree situation. Family ties, that is personal ties, al-

low for “sitting and talking” and supportive relationships. One cannot work in God’s kingdom and at the same time ignore his brother (1 John 4:20).

Relationships are cultivated and committing time to fellow-workers or fellow-Christians is the single, greatest deterrent to an unhealthy congregation. Time management may be good for business, but there is no way to measure the good done by spending time with God’s family. When one is truly a friend, conflict is neither feared nor avoided. Conflict is just part of family business.

### CONFLICT: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Lord was very concerned about conflict and the effect real disagreement has on a congregation.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:15-17).

Offenders, those who cause real conflict, are to be disciplined. The term translated “trespass” is *hamorteesan* (sin).<sup>6</sup> A brother has really sinned against another. There is no imagined hurt nor simple anger over another’s mis-communicated feelings discussed here. Petty prides and imagined slights are not part of this teaching by Christ, but a real, **private** offense has occurred. (Note that both the offender and the one offended are actually under obligation to go to one another; Mat. 5:23-24). False teachers are **not** under consideration in this passage. Those who pervert doctrine are to be marked and avoided, not approached (Rom. 16:17-18; Tit. 3:10).

The sinning brother is to be “told his fault” (*elengchon*, rebuked). Note that one is **not** to tell anyone else what happened. Too often, when one Christian sins against another, the offended brother will run to the elders (or others) and tell them. Such an action inflames the conflict and hinders resolution. It takes a deep spirituality to realize that one could do the same thing as the offender and to react with meekness and fear, considering oneself (Gal. 6:1-2). If you offended someone, would you want the matter spread over the entire congregation? “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do

to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mat. 7:12).

The second step in the conflict resolution method for private offences commanded by Christ occurs when the offender will not repent (Mat. 18:16). One is still not allowed to tell anyone else about the matter; not even the one or two others chosen as “witnesses” are to be told, beforehand, the details. They are to go with the offended one to hear for the **first** time what is occurring. Note the Lord’s efforts to avoid gossip and to deter the spreading of the situation so that there is a chance for resolution. There is no hint in the text that the one or two who go with the offended Christian are to be pre-programmed. Such would prejudice their thinking before they heard the matter. The whole effort is to **regain** the offending brother, not to drive him away. There are no enemies here (2 The. 3:15). The principle of justice concerning two or three witnesses is a constant with God and not peculiar to the church (Deu. 19:15).

If the first two steps fail to regain the brother, the matter is to be told to the church (Mat. 18:17a). This step is not for purposes of withdrawal, but to request the aid of every other Christian in the church to go with the offended one to the brother. There seems to be no mandate here to be detailed about the sin in telling the church, but simply to ask the congregation for help in regaining the brother. There are only two occasions that are known to this writer where this step was actually followed. Both of the offenders were called on by the whole congregation. Both repented! All of God’s family are to be concerned, one with the other. These are matters for all members, not just the elders nor preacher. The church is not being told in order to gossip about the matter, but in order to practice love for the lost brother. (Note that out-of-duty brethren, those not attending, are not mentioned here. Christians must get a Bible study with that erring brother; Jam. 5:19-20.)

The next (but not final) step, if the brother remains impenitent, is to withdraw the fellowship of the **entire** congregation. (This writer has a pet peeve about the term **disfellowship** bandied about by brethren. Webster does not include the word in his latest dictionaries—it may be found in *Webster’s Third International*—and the Greek lexicons do not have it. A withdrawn-from brother is not dis-enfranchised; he is still a brother; 2 The. 3:15). A Christian is still obligated to try to

reach the brother (even though he is impenitent) whenever one has opportunity so to do. *Webster's Third International* more nearly describes the biblical practice as "removal of fellowship."

The purpose of withdrawal is to try to shame the impenitent brother so that he repents (1 Cor. 5:5). The military academies sometimes practice what is called "the cold shoulder" toward a cadet who is being disciplined. Whenever the cadet is approaching fellow classmates, the latter snap to attention and turn their backs on the offender. He is being shamed. Such is the purpose of withdrawal. No member of the congregation is to socialize with the impenitent nor indicate by some friendly act that the offender is "okay" (1 Cor. 5:9-11). Why? To draw the offender back to God is the sole purpose for **withdrawing**. The Christian is "backing away" from the impenitent brother trying to get him to come near. If one thinks of the brother as "dis-fellowshipped" (excommunicated), one is prone to wash one's hands of the brother and to forget him. There is little resolution in the latter thinking, and there is little love (1 John 2:10-11).

Jesus insisted that, when Christians handle real matters of private sins correctly, He and all of heaven are behind the action:

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound [already is bound] in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask [concerning private offenses], it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Mat. 18:18-20).

Real conflict requires real solution. Christ has made it clear that all parties are to be treated with dignity and respect in matters private and public. The feelings of humans, however, often interfere with Jesus' instructions. Many Christians refuse to practice this teaching of the Master.

Resistance to proper conflict resolution concerning private matters can be seen when preachers fail (or refuse) to teach such passages as Matthew 18:15-20. Few like to be wrong or enjoy having a fence placed around their wants; and psychological reluctance to pursue the right occurs.

Resistance to resolution also occurs because of guilt. If one "feels bad" because one hurt his brother, one may simply try to avoid the

situation or devalue it. “And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, *there* thou hast *that is* thine” (Mat. 25:5).

Fear has caused many private conflicts to be unresolved. The proper fear (awe) of God is the beginning of wisdom, but the fear of man is a trap (Psa. 111:10; Pro. 29:25). People do not buy motorcycles because they are afraid to ride them. People are often so fearful of being hurt that they refuse to go to settle a matter. Most often, once one goes, the matter is never so terrible as he thought.

The incentives to resolving conflicts arising from private offenses are many. One has obeyed the Lord, loved his brother, protected the church, and found peace of mind. Self-actualization always results in self-esteem and a sense of belonging to a greater good.

### CONFLICT: PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

According to the apostle Paul, if unconditional love were present in the lives of Christians, then most, if not all, conflict could be set aside (1 Cor. 13:1-13). Family members seem to be able to practice unconditional love for the most part, and unconditional love is a primary goal for congregations of God’s people. However, people tend to put conditions on love because of fear of failing in the relationship. Such fear affects preachers, elders, members (that is, people in general). There are some principles that can ease this “fear” and temper conflict.<sup>7</sup>

The first concept necessary to good leadership and conflict management is the realization that one cannot be prepared for all the varying types of disagreement. One needs to “expect the unexpected.” A sister-in-Christ became angry at a preacher and would not speak to him; eventually she left the congregation. Why? She had phoned the preacher to inform him that her dog had died. He was sympathetic over the phone, and they seemed to have had a congenial talk. The preacher later discovered that the woman complained because he had not visited her at home! Expect the unexpected from some people. James noted:

From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they* not hence, *even* of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not (Jam. 4:1-2).

A second principle to remember is that good interpersonal relationships start with God and are internal in nature. God is the source of

peace among men of good will (Luke 2:14). Christ is peace and help for spiritual men (Phi. 4:7; Eph. 2:14). Paul spoke of three categories of people: (1) the naturalists (1 Cor. 2:14); (2) the carnal (1 Cor. 3:1); (3) the spiritual (Rom. 12:1). Only the spiritual man has inner peace, for he has been transformed (Rom. 12:2).

A third area to hold in mind concerning conflict is the Bible teaching on some of the causes of poor interpersonal relationships. Greed caused a man to be at odds with his brother (Luke 12:13-15). One's own faults are a hindrance (Mat. 7:1-5). Those who are bitter, lacking in self-control, unforgiving, hypercritical, judgmental, wrathful, insecure, prejudiced, and close-minded (among other things) are not apt to be helpful in resolving conflicts. Such people also make poor leaders (1 Tim. 3:3). Conflict "patterns" manifest themselves when dealing with such persons. There seem to be constant cries to "win," shouting, temper tantrums, intimidation, and other bad attitudes instead of open discussion.

In the fourth place there should be the recognition that there is a difference between concerned disagreement and conflict. Conflict is disagreement, but the result of conflict is that no decision is reached (or people cannot move forward even if a decision is made). Christians may fear that any disagreement means conflict, but a problem and/or a difference of opinion does not necessarily mean conflict. There is conflict only if the group cannot make a decision or cannot move forward. Participants in debate do not quit just because the discussion is "spirited."

A fifth general principle to be considered is that there is a great gulf fixed between reconciliation and resolution. *Resolution*, according to Webster, means a formal expression of will or intent; an answer has been found. *Reconciliation* means that the opposing parties have been brought together. Some issues will never be resolved. (As an example, ask a group of faithful gospel preachers what the "gift of the Holy Spirit" is; Acts 2:38). But people can still be reconciled if attitudes remain Christian, as noted above. There are times when seeking leads to compromise, and no real good is accomplished. (Witness the number of visitation programs and church programs in general that die because leaders try to please everyone.) Reconciliation often requires submission of self for the greater good, while resolution might stop a work completely.

A last principle considered here is that there is a difference between being peaceful and being a peacemaker. Some leaders refuse to become involved in anything controversial, justifying their positions as “trying to be peaceful.” Peacemakers do not abdicate their responsibilities, but often are in the middle of the conflict. God’s peace must first be **pure**, then **peaceable** (Jam. 3:17). Peacemakers take risks and are willing to enter the battle with hearts filled with God’s Word.

### CONCLUSION

Solomon wrote: “He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife” (Pro. 28:25). Conflict is not bypassed in God’s Word; the subject is much discussed—especially man’s conflict with God because of his sin. The **resolution** of this greatest conflict of all required the death of God’s Son (John 3:16-17). Man, however, is **reconciled** to God as a forgiven sinner. Man’s status as a sinner is not resolved; rather it is reconciled (Rom. 6:23).

Many conflicts among men will never be resolved. But the application of sound, biblical principles will aid God’s people to remain reconciled while trying to resolve many issues. Wise Christians recognize the causes of most conflict, expect such to happen, and love one another while resolution is sought. Forgetting those things behind, let Christians press on to a higher calling (Phi. 3:13-14).

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), p. 335.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Terry C. Muck, ed. “Conflict and Crises,” *Leadership*, Spring 1980, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>Wayne Jacobsen, “Seven Reasons for Staff Conflict,” *Leadership*, Summer 1983, pp. 34-39. Jacobsen’s ideas are the skeleton here, but were adapted for biblical reasons.

<sup>6</sup>Greek references are from Machen and Bauer.

<sup>7</sup>Three of the principles are adapted from Gary Fenton, “A Crash Course in Conflict,” *Leadership*, Fall 1996, pp. 38-40.

# HOW TO HANDLE CRITICISM

*Ira Y. Rice, Jr.*



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Having now been preaching for over sixty years, Ira is the Editor of two monthly periodicals, **Contending For The Faith** and **The Far East/ World Evangelism Newsletter**. He is also the author of several books. He is a co-founder and President of Four Seas College of Bible and Missions, in Singapore, and has served as Chairman of its Board of Directors since 1968. He has been a missionary to the Far East under the oversight of the elders of the Bellview Church of Christ, Pensacola, Florida, since 1978. Ira has preached the Gospel in over sixty countries around the world and recently helped to establish the church of Christ in Latvia.

## INTRODUCTION

When I sat down to write Volume I of my three-volume series, *Axe On The Root*, my wife suggested that I think it over carefully if I could handle the criticism it was certain to cause. “There is nothing,” she warned, “that your enemies will not dig up, dream up, or invent to destroy you and drag you down.” I thought it over carefully—for about five minutes—decided that I could take whatever criticism they might hurl, and went right on writing. During the 30-odd years since that first volume appeared, followed later by Volumes II and III, in addition to 27 years of editing and publishing *Contending For The Faith*, I have had plenty of opportunity to know how right she was. That I still am here doing everything I can to defend the truth of the gospel as it was once delivered unto the saints indicates that, at least in some measure, God has blessed me to learn how to handle personal attacks.

## JESUS' TEACHING ON HANDLING CRITICISM

How to deal with personal criticism was considered right up front by Jesus Christ, our Lord, in his first recorded sermon—**The Sermon on the Mount**. Concluding what now are known as his “beatitudes,” in Matthew 5, he said,

Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Mat. 5:10-12).

Luke's account of this same discourse by our Lord, reads as follows:

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach *you*, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets (Luke 6:22-23).

From these two passages, it should be noted that the persecution or hate under consideration must be for “righteousness' sake” or for “the Son of man's sake.” The reviling and evil speaking must be false if we are to be blessed for it. If such is the case, then we should be happy to endure it, rather than morose. Matthew 5 says, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad,” Luke 6 says, “Rejoice...and leap for joy.” Why? Both say because great is our reward in heaven.

Farther along in that lesson, Jesus taught us to love our enemies (Mat. 5:38-48). He pointed out that, of old time, it had been said, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”; but **He** said, “that ye resist not evil.” Rather than just loving one's neighbor but hating one's enemy, he averred,

I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you...For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Mat. 5:44, 46-48).

## PAUL'S TEACHING ON HANDLING CRITICISM

Many of us tend to revert to the old law when we come under attack even for our faith. The apostle Paul, however, taught us to follow him even as he followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). In Romans 12, he said,

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:14, 17-21).

## PETER'S TEACHING ON HANDLING CRITICISM

Just like Paul, the apostle Peter also followed Jesus' teaching on handling criticism. For instance, in First Peter, we find two notable examples, as follows:

Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil. And who *is* he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy *are ye*: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For *it is* better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing (1 Pet. 3:9-17).

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evildoer, or *as* a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:12-16).

## NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF HANDLING CRITICISM

### Jesus' Example

When, following His betrayal and arrest, Jesus was brought before Caiaphas, the high priest, Caiaphas questioned Jesus of His disciples and of His doctrine (John 18:13ff).

In His answer, Jesus said,

I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said (John 18:20-21).

One of the officers who stood by took offense at Jesus' reply, striking him with the palm of his hand, and saying, "Answerest thou the high priest so?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John 18:22-23).

When, a little later, they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the judgment hall to be judged of Pilate, the Roman Governor, Pilate went out unto them, saying, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" Their answer implied that Jesus was a "malefactor." After Pilate examined Jesus in the judgment hall, he returned to the Jews saying, "I find in him no fault at all" (John 18:29-38).

Rather than answering accusation for accusation and railing for railing, Jesus gave Pilate no answer. But for the demands of the Jews, he would have let Jesus go. Finally, however, in exasperation, he delivered Jesus to His accusers to be crucified.

While Jesus was on the cross, they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Mat. 27:40).

Likewise the chief priests, together with the scribes and elders, mocked Him saying,

He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God (Mat.27:42-43).

The thieves also, which were crucified with Jesus, cast the same charge in His teeth. However, even in His distress, Jesus answered

them not a word, praying only, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

### Peter’s Example

From the very first day of the beginning of the gospel, the cause of Christ was subjected to criticism of the baser sort. For instance, in Acts 2, when the Jews dwelling in Jerusalem “out of every nation under heaven” were confounded and could not explain every man hearing the apostles speak in their own language on Pentecost, some in the multitude asked, “What meaneth this?” while others mocking charged, “These men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:12-13).

Instead of retaliating with counter charges, Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them,

Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:14-16).

After quoting Joel’s prophecy, taken from Joel 2:28-32, Peter launched into a well-reasoned effort to convince their false accusers that they had by wicked hands crucified and slain Jesus of Nazareth, “a man approved of God...Whom God hath raised from the dead” (Acts 2:22-24). He then cited two passages from David: Psalms 16:8-11 and Psalms 110:1. He explained that David could not have been referring to himself since he was “both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day”; instead, being a prophet, God had sworn with an oath to him that

of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear (Acts 2:30-33).

Continuing his persuasion from the Scriptures, Peter concluded by saying, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

So convincing was Peter’s reasoning that they were “pricked in their heart,” saying to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?” Thus, for the first time, the requirements

of the gospel were preached unto them, and about three thousand souls, having “gladly received his word,” were baptized (Acts 2:37-41).

Quite some time later, after Peter and certain other brethren from Joppa had responded to an invitation by Cornelius, a Gentile centurion from Caesarea (Acts 10), word got back to the apostles and brethren in Judea that the Gentiles also had received the Word of God. This so distressed those that were “of the circumcision,” that when Peter came to Jerusalem, they contended with him, saying, “Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” (Acts 11:3).

Ordinarily, as a Jew, such a criticism could have been disastrous. However, both as a disciple and one of Jesus’ apostles, Peter had been using the “keys” to the “kingdom” promised to him in Matthew 16:19. Rehearsing the matter from the beginning, he told of the vision he had seen in a trance while praying at Joppa, of the voice from heaven which said three times, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 11:9), and of the Spirit bidding him go, nothing doubting.

Peter told of taking six brethren with him from Joppa, of Cornelius having seen an angel who instructed him to “Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:13-14). He further described how that,

as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:15-17).

With these words Peter convinced his accusers that “God also to the Gentiles” had “granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18); so they held their peace and glorified God.

### **Peter’s and John’s Example**

After the healing of the lame man (in Acts 3), causing “about five thousand men” to believe, Peter and John were brought before the rulers, elders, and scribes, together with the high priest and his kin-

dred, who demanded to know, “By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” (Acts 4:7).

Rather than being intimidated by this implied criticism, Peter, being filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them,

Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:8-12).

Taken aback by the boldness of Peter and John, they required them to go aside out of the council while they conferred among themselves. Confessing that they could not deny that a notable miracle had been performed, they were in a quandary what to do to these men. However, that their doctrine spread no farther among the people, the council decided to threaten them that they speak no more in the name of Jesus. When they called Peter and John back before them and commanded them that they neither speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus, the apostles replied, saying, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).

Finding no way to punish them, all that the council could do was further threaten them and let them go, whereupon Peter and John returned to their own company and reported it all to them. Rather than keeping quiet, however, they prayed,

And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus (Acts 4:29-30).

### **Peter And The Other Apostles' Example**

When they had thus prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke the Word of God with boldness. Rather than slink back into silence and oblivion, Acts 5 says that many signs and wonders were wrought among the people who with one accord assembled at Solo-

mon's Porch, which was part of the Jewish temple—about as public a place to be found. Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Not only did those of Jerusalem bring their sick into the streets, laying them along in beds and couches, but a multitude of sick folks came from the cities roundabout, and everyone was healed.

All this so disturbed the high priest and those that were with him that they seized the apostles and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord, by night, opened the prison doors and brought them forth, saying, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard *that*, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught" (Acts 5:20-21).

When the high priest and the council and all the senate of the children of Israel sent to the prison to have the apostles brought, the officers returned reporting they had found the prison shut securely with guards at the doors, "But when we had opened, we found no man within" (Acts 5:23). Someone came, saying that the men they had put in prison were standing in the temple, and teaching the people. The captain with his officers went to the temple, brought them without violence, and set them before the council.

The high priest demanded, saying, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28). Peter and the other apostles answered and said,

We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and *so is* also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him (Acts 5:29-32).

When the council heard this, being cut to the heart, they took counsel to kill the apostles. However, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, counseled caution. So, after calling the apostles and beating them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. In turn, the apostles, after departing from the council, rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for His name, ceasing not to teach and preach Jesus Christ daily in the temple and in every house.

From Acts 6 we learn that when the number of the disciples had multiplied, the Grecians murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Rather than being upset by such criticism, the apostles called the multitude together.

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:2-4).

Such forthright dealing with their complaint defused criticism. Seven men were chosen whom were set before the apostles who prayed, laid hands on them, and appointed them “over this business,” causing the Word of God to increase and the number of the disciples to multiply greatly in Jerusalem.

### Stephen’s Example

At the end of Acts 6, after Stephen, “full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:8), there arose certain of the Synagogue of the Libertines and others disputing with Stephen. Being unable to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke, they suborned men, which said,

We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and *against* God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon *him*, and caught him, and brought *him* to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel (Acts 6:11-15).

Of course, all such charges were false. However, rather than counter-charging these suborned men as false witnesses, Stephen delivered before the council what has to be one of the most remarkable sermons of all time. At the close of his discourse, Stephen ended with these words:

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept *it* (Acts 7:51-53).

So incensed were Stephen's listeners by these words that they gnashed on him with their teeth.

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56).

Being further stirred by these unwelcome words, those in the council stopped their ears and crying with a loud voice, ran upon him with one accord, thrust him out of the city, and stoned him to death.

Even in dying, no hint of self-pity or railing accusation fell from his lips. As they stoned him, Stephen called on God to receive his spirit. crying with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60).

### Paul's and Silas's Example

When Paul and Silas commanded the spirit of divination to come out of the damsel at Philippi, her masters, seeing that the hope of their gain was gone, took them before the magistrates. They charged that "these men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans" (Acts 16:20-21). The magistrates rent off their clothes and commanded that they be beaten and then thrust into prison. The whole thing was a frame-up. However, instead of moaning and groaning, at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God.

The next day the magistrates sent sergeants saying, "Let these men go." When the keeper of the prison relayed this message to Paul, saying, "go in peace," Paul demurred, saying,

They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast *us* into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought *them* out, and desired *them* to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into *the house of Lydia*: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed (Acts 16:37-40).

### LESSONS LEARNED FOR HANDLING CRITICISM

No doubt many other New Testament passages could be cited as to how Christians should handle criticism; however, the ones considered should be more than sufficient to establish the doctrine of Christ. Among the lessons we have learned already are the following:

1. Rather than criticism always being a blot on one's character, if it is for **righteousness**' sake or for the **Son of man's** sake, Christians should rejoice and consider themselves blessed, for great is their reward in heaven.

2. Rather than seeking to avenge ourselves for such grievances, we should remember that vengeance belongs to God. We should love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us.

3. Christians should recompense to no man evil for evil.

4. We should not be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good.

5. If it be possible, as much as in us lies, we should strive to live peaceably with all men.

6. By doing good to those who criticize us, we "heap coals of fire on their head."

7. Let him who loves life and would see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile.

8. Be not afraid of critics' terror, neither be troubled.

9. Christians should sanctify the Lord God in our heart: and be always ready to give an answer to every man who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that whereas they speak evil of us, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ.

10. It is better, if the will of God be so, that we suffer for well doing than for evil doing.

11. We are not to think it strange if such fiery trials come upon us, for thereby we become partakers of Christ's sufferings.

12. If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

13. When possible, let others bear witness to our innocence rather than testify on our own behalf.

14. Sometimes it is better just to be silent rather than to respond to criticism.

15. When it is possible to cite scripture in our own defense, as Peter did on Pentecost, do so.

16. Rather than being intimidated by enemies of righteousness, we should learn to speak with boldness.

17. When men command us contrary to God, we should obey God rather than men.

18. If we are made to suffer for the name of Christ, rather than complain, we should rejoice.

19. When imprisoned for the cause of Christ, it is a great testimonial to our faith to be able to sing and pray as Paul and Silas did that midnight at Philippi.

20. When our citizenship can be used to the advantage of the cause we serve, as Paul's and Silas's Roman citizenship was at Philippi, it is all right to do so.

# CONGREGATIONS WITHOUT ELDERS

*Jerry L. Martin*



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## INTRODUCTION

The theme of this Twenty-second Annual Bellview Lectureship is “Leadership.” You will read in this volume of the different forms and functions of leadership. The key position of spiritual leadership in the Lord’s church has been given to the elders. Yet, there are a great number of congregations that have no elders. What are these congregations to do to assure that they have elders in the near future? There are only two or three reasons why a congregation would be without elders.

A congregation may have had elders, but one or more of them move away or died, therefore leaving the congregation temporarily without a plurality of leaders. This situation should be rectified easily in most congregations if the former elders properly fed the flock. Additional men who are qualified to be elders ought to be readily available because leaders are constantly being developed.

There are other congregations who have no leaders either because of a lack of desire to serve by those who otherwise would be qualified or a lack of desire on the part of the congregation to select men who are qualified. Congregations of the Lord’s people who have qualified men who aren’t serving have a serious problem. What it sometimes

amounts to is that there is one or two people who aren't qualified to serve as elders who want to "run the church." This "Diotrephes" attitude will strangle any attempt of the congregation to become scripturally organized. It must sadden the heart of God to see the church held hostage by such attitudes.

The most obvious and understandable reason for a congregation not to have elders is that it is newly established, which is natural and certainly expected. We notice that the newly converted Christians who made up the congregations of the New Testament fit into this category. Today, we commonly call them mission congregations. Let us discuss the lack of leadership in newly formed or mission congregations, look at why they don't have elders, and consider how spiritually mature leadership can be developed.

I don't consider myself an expert on this matter of congregations without elders, but I do have some experience and insight that hopefully will be helpful. I grew up in a strong congregation in Arkansas that had godly elders that trained the local congregation and that were mission minded. They supported me to attend the Memphis School of Preaching. Fresh out of school I entered the mission fields of middle Georgia and worked with a congregation with no elders. This was one of the best works I've ever been involved in, but I was inexperienced and the demand to "be all and do all" wore me down. I made a decision to leave that good work on a blue day. I remember thinking that "an older more experienced man should have gotten the rough spots ironed out while I was having my rough edges ironed out under the oversight of a good eldership."

I left the mission work and for the next ten years worked under two different elderships, the second of which was a true pleasure to work with. The elders at the Blackwater Macedonia congregation, located near Jasper, Alabama, are good sound men with hearts for evangelism. In 1990, the eldership decided to get involved with a mission work in Meeker, Colorado. There were three Christians meeting regularly in a house the church owned. The Blackwater congregation sent a group of us out to conduct a door knocking campaign and a Vacation Bible School. The campaign was a huge success and revealed great potential in this small Colorado town. The elders and I spent months trying to find a preacher to send to this new work. We knew it would need to be a man with experience who had a good support net-

work for there would not be another preacher within a one hundred mile radius. I had some flash-backs from my time spent in the mission fields of Georgia. I knew a young inexperienced preacher would likely not survive. I remembered that, as a young preacher, I thought “the older preachers ought to be willing to go to work out the rough spots of a mission work.” But, I now understood why more older preachers don’t go to small mission works; the fact is, I liked it where I was! I loved the congregation at Blackwater. The elders handled all the tough situations that came up. We had an active and grounded membership. I was comfortable, that is, until my conscience got to bothering me. I would see the pleading faces of those members in Meeker, Colorado, when I closed my eyes at night. I finally approached the Blackwater elders with the option of them sending me to this mission area. At first they refused, and we looked for someone else. Finally, through much prayer and many tears, the decision was mutually made for me move to Meeker. My family and I have, for the last six years, worked in this mission area with no elders. So, for eight of the eighteen years I have been preaching, I have preached for a congregation without elders. I have discovered some things that are not new, but some Christians aren’t aware of them. Other have forgotten them, and still others ignore them.

It is obvious from the Scriptures that the Lord intended that every congregation eventually have elders. Paul said to Titus, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee” (Tit. 1:5). Paul then gives Titus the qualifications required of the men that were to be ordained elders (Tit. 1:6-9). It’s plain to see that when there are no elders in a congregation there is something wanting or lacking. After giving the same qualifications to Timothy, Paul informed the young preacher:

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

If a congregation follows the inspired instructions for correct spiritual behavior, it will develop proper spiritual leaders. The explanation of the required qualification of elders is discussed by others in this lec-

tureship volume. Let us now focus our attention on congregations without elders.

### **CONGREGATIONS WITHOUT ELDERS ARE EVIDENCE OF EVANGELISM**

The book of Acts demonstrates the natural process involved in establishing congregations of the Lord's church. Everyone that obeys the gospel makes up the congregation in that city. We see this in Jerusalem (Acts 2-6). We see it in the cities of Samaria (Acts 8). We see it in every city that Paul and his company traveled to on his missionary journeys (Acts 13-28). All of the Christians in these cities were new converts, and therefore none of them would be mature enough spiritually to meet the qualifications expected of elders (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1). However, each of these new Christians are expected to heed Peter's instructions: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2).

It is to be expected that, when we as Christians respond to the Lord's charge to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Mat. 28:19), we will have congregations without elders to begin with. Now we are not talking about our local evangelistic efforts, for we expect those converted in our own communities to worship and work with us. We have reference here to evangelizing cities or communities where there are no existing congregations. So, my friend, we should expect congregations in their early years not to have elders. There is no reason to panic or to think that this is strange because it is natural when true evangelism is taking place. We should patiently and consistently develop the abilities and talents within young congregations.

### **CONGREGATIONS WITHOUT ELDERS ARE TO BE EDUCATED AND EQUIPPED**

There is no area of weakness among the Lord's people more disturbing than the lack of educating and equipping of new Christians. Millions of dollars are allocated every year for mission work both "stateside" and "abroad." We militantly and energetically preach the gospel to the lost. Souls are converted to Christ, and yet too often we have no plans beyond "baptizing" them. When we have no plan or process by which we educate and equip the saints, we fall far short of

the Lord's charge in Matthew 28. He intended that those who were baptized be taught more than baptism. Notice, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Mat. 28:20).

Those new converts in Jerusalem received further instruction from the apostles, for it is said of them, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The congregation in Jerusalem eventually had elders because there was continuous teaching and equipping of the Christians in that city (Acts 11:29-30; 15:2, 6). We would do well to read and study this example of a spiritual educational program in a local congregation.

The apostle Paul went back to the congregations he had established for the purpose of "confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22). Similar terminology is found in Acts 15:41. Christians have to be educated and equipped before they can be confirmed. When they are strengthened and given the understanding and know-how to carry on a local work, handle problems, and evangelize others, they ought to have men who are mature enough to serve as leaders. After Paul confirmed the souls of the disciples, he then "ordained them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23).

There is a tremendous amount of planning that should go into congregational development. There should be just as much concern for spiritual growth as there is for numerical increase. When Paul and Timothy traveled through the cities of Asia Minor, "they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:4-5). Acts 20 records Paul calling for the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet him in Miletus. The words Paul shares with these men gives us some insight into what is involved in educating and equipping a congregation in its leadership development process.

And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: *And* how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the

Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:18-32).

The first thing Paul used to help build up this congregation was his own exemplary life. From the first day he was with these Christians, he served God with humility of mind. Young congregations without elders today need such examples. Strong mature preachers are invaluable to proper development of congregations. That doesn't seem to be the way we want to do things in the church today. We too often send young inexperienced preachers to the smaller congregations that don't yet have mature leaders. More times than not, both the congregation and the preacher become discouraged. There is a tremendous need for mature Christians to go into mission areas and devote some time helping with Bible classes, teaching young men and women, helping conduct worship services, teaching young Christians how to visit and conduct Bible studies, and just living good, godly lives before those young in the faith. We might be shocked at how quickly a congregation would mature if we would send those grounded in the faith to help young congregations get off to a good start. It might also shock us to see how quickly a young preacher would mature if he was brought in to work under a good eldership and trained in proper congregational development. The bottom line is, congregations without elders don't need preachers without experience. We are losing the battle of filling pulpits and equipping congregations because we

aren't following clear biblical examples of how to evangelize, educate, edify, and equip. I'm afraid we have become comfortable with a reverse order of things.

The second thing Paul emphasizes to the Ephesian elders was that he kept nothing back that was profitable unto them. He educated them for a space of three years by teaching them publicly and from house to house. He made sure they had been taught the whole counsel of God. He warned them of dangers they were sure to face and taught them how to face them. Such congregations with strong leaders can be developed today if the same process is followed.

The final thing Paul did was to share these encouraging words with the elders of Ephesus: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Every congregation deserves an educational program that will place them safely in the hands of a loving God, guide them by the Word of His grace, and assure them of an inheritance among them that are sanctified. That is the reason the apostle Paul told Timothy, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:1-2).

### **CONGREGATIONS WITHOUT ELDERS ARE TO BE ENCOURAGED AND EDIFIED**

Let's go back a moment to Jesus' authoritative charge:

All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:18-20).

New Christians in congregations without elders are no different than new Christians in any other congregation; they must be educated or taught to observe all things that the Lord has commanded. This teaching is just as imperative as teaching that instructs someone how to become a Christian. The same Jesus, who has all power, commanded both. But how is this teaching done? Who plans the instructions? Who decides when each subject is dealt with? These questions might seem trivial to those who are used to elders planning curriculum for years in

advance for elders, preachers, or any number of mature men teaching a variety of classes every week. Such decisions are not trivial in a congregation without mature leaders. More often than not, especially in mission areas, those decisions are made and those classes are taught by one man, usually the preacher. More times than not the preacher making those decisions and teaching those classes is young, enthusiastic, and inexperienced. The context of the Lord's charge, however, was first given to the most mature disciples He had—the eleven (Mat. 28:16-20). These mature disciple could encourage and edify (build up) new disciples.

The exciting and enlightening missionary journeys of the book of Acts reveal that mature Christians were sent to do the initial teaching, to establish congregations, and confirm them in the faith. Included were men like Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Luke (Acts 13:2; 15:40-41). Then there was a mature couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who traveled with Paul from Corinth and were left in Ephesus. Who knows what would have happened in Ephesus when Apollos came to town teaching the baptism of John if Aquilla and Priscilla had not been there? They took Apollos aside and “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:24-26). Chances are that Paul would not have sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20) if he had not preached and taught in that city for three years. Today, most congregations without elders, especially in mission areas, are in desperate need of such encouragement from mature Christians who can build them up in the faith. Brethren, let's go back and study God's plan for educating, equipping, encouraging, and edifying the local congregations. Then, let's work the plan.

### **CONGREGATIONS WITHOUT ELDERS ECHO THE “MACEDONIAN CALL”**

Congregations without proper leaders are crying out, “Come over... and help us” (Acts 16:9). These Christians, for the most part, are young in the faith. They have a sincere desire to grow and they recognize that, “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). But, unfortunately, most of these new converts cannot say of themselves what was said of Timothy: “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures,

which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). They want to learn all they can so they can be completely equipped for every good work, but they need mature mothers and fathers in the faith to nurture them.

### **WHAT CONGREGATIONS WITHOUT ELDERS NEED**

1. They need strong congregations with good elders to support them financially and morally. Such strong congregations need to become personally involved with helping young congregations to properly chart their course of spiritual growth. Good elderships could see that Gospel Meetings and Vacation Bible Schools are conducted in mission areas. They should even encourage their members to go and help these smaller congregations.

2. They need spiritually mature and experienced preachers to help lay the proper foundations, face the special challenges of establishing a new congregation, and lead the congregation in the process of training leaders.

3. They need mature Christians willing to move to the area and help provide some spiritual stability and a pattern of godliness. This would be a grand opportunity for retired couples to devote some of their time in a mission area to help edify young Christians. They could help the preacher develop a long range plan for church growth and Bible class curriculum. The mature men could help train those younger in the faith to get involved in the Father’s business. Basic things such as conducting a men’s business meeting is often a chore in a congregation where there are no elders. The older ladies could help develop chaste, godly women of the membership who could help insure a bright future and a good influence for the congregation.

4. They need young, but mature, couples just starting their careers to look for employment in these areas and do mission work at the same time. This would help provide needed talent and zeal in a congregation where such talent and zeal is just being developed in new converts. The young men could lead singing, teach classes, and in general be “an example of the believers.” In like fashion the young women could teach classes and provide an example of Christianity.

5. They need a steady, consistent, long term, planned diet of “sound doctrine” so they can “grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

6. They need our prayers, concern, encouragement, and assistance.

7. They need time to grow.

With the Lord's blessings, the right kind of teaching, the help of concerned, mature Christians, and personal perseverance, congregations without elders can one day have them. There are so many talents that members of the Lord's church have that must be used, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). Individuals that are members of congregations who don't have elders, but who are working hard to develop them, should take heart and continue to add the Christian graces to their lives; one day strong leadership will be the fruit of their labor. "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:8).

Let us accept the challenge to always trust and follow God's plan for spiritual growth, for in so doing, we will never fail:

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:15-16).

# WORK OF DEACONS

*B. J. Clarke*



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## INTRODUCTION

In His infinite wisdom God provided a blueprint for the organization of His church. It is inconceivable that He would do otherwise. No community can exist for very long without some form of government. God's simple pattern of organization for His kingdom is clearly revealed within the pages of the New Testament, and man has absolutely no authority to tamper with these instructions. Therefore, to properly determine what qualifications a man must possess before he can be appointed as a deacon, one must adhere to the Divine data recorded in Holy Scripture. Likewise, in determining what the function of a deacon should be within the body of Christ, we must not rely upon our human think-so's or our own ingenuity to arrive at our conclusions.

Hence, in this lesson we shall rely upon the Bible, and the Bible alone, for our conclusions. "If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). Accordingly, let us investigate the Bible doctrine of deacons by investigating six main areas: (1) **Definitions**;

(2) **Demands**; (3) **Disqualifications**; (4) **Duties**; (5) **Deviations**; and (6) **Distinctions**.

### DEFINITIONS

What is meant by the term *deacon*? I heard the story of a Bible class teacher who asked one of her students to define the words, *elder*, *preacher*, and *deacon*. The young student replied, “That’s easy. An elder is one who oversees the flock, a preacher is one who proclaims the gospel, and a deacon is... a deacon is... a deacon is that light that blinks and shines by the seashore.” The student’s answer may all too well reflect the ignorance of some toward the definition and duties of deacons. Someone has suggested that deacons are like the third verse of a song with four verses—they are there, but hardly ever noticed.

Our English word *deacon* is an anglicized form of the Greek word *diakonos*, which means “a waiter, attendant, servant, or minister; and this is from the verb *diakoneo*, to wait upon, to serve, to minister; and this again is derived from *diako* or *dieko*, to run, to hasten. The radical idea is, therefore, **active service**.”<sup>1</sup> Noun and verb forms of *diakonos* occur over 90 times in the Greek New Testament. Careful study of these occurrences reveals both a general and specific definition of the word *diakonos*.

For example, when the ten disciples were moved with indignation against James and John because of their mother’s request that they be granted positions of honor in Christ’s kingdom, Jesus admonished the ten, saying, “but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your *diakonos*” (Mat. 20:26). The word is translated “servant” in the King James Version, and is used similarly in Matthew 22:13; 23:11; and Mark 9:35. Furthermore, the account of the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee reveals that Mary said unto the *diakonoi* to do whatever Jesus told them to do (John 2:5). Obviously, the use of the word in this passage cannot refer to deacons in the church since the Lord’s church had not yet been established. Here, again, the word is translated in the general sense of “servants.”

Another interesting example of the use of the word *diakonos* is found in Paul’s letter to the Romans. In discussing the relationship between God and government, Paul declared that the ruler of the government is the *diakonos* of God (Rom. 13:4). It may be unusual for us to consider a government ruler as a “deacon” of God, but in the general sense of being a minister to serve the purpose of God, it is true.

Paul referred to himself and Apollos as the *diakonoi* by whom the Corinthians had believed (1 Cor. 3:5; Cf., 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4). Paul also declared that he had been made a *diakonos* of the gospel according to the grace of God (Col. 1:23; Eph. 3:7). Tychicus was a faithful *diakonos* of the Lord (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7). The same is said of Epaphras (Col. 1:7). Jesus Christ is referred to as a *diakonon* of the circumcision for the truth of God (Rom. 15:8). In the general sense of the word, even Satan has *diakonoi* who masquerade as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:15).

The point of the foregoing is to demonstrate that the word *diakonos* does not always refer to the special class of servants in the church known as deacons. For example, Paul's first letter to Timothy uses the term in a general sense, and a narrow sense. In First Timothy 4:6, Paul exhorts Timothy to put the brethren in remembrance in order that he might be a good *diakonos* of Jesus Christ. One should not deduce from this passage that Timothy was a deacon in the sense that he was a special servant, appointed by the church to carry out the bidding of the elders. However, in First Timothy 3:8, 10, 12-13, Paul employs the same Greek term to refer to a specific function and role granted only to certain men who meet certain qualifications.

But someone may inquire, "Since the word *diakonos* is so often used in a general sense, how can we be certain that the usage of the word in First Timothy 3:8-13 is to be taken in a more narrow and restrictive sense? For that matter, since the term is used in the New Testament most frequently in a general sense to connote service or ministry, what evidence is there that the word should ever be confined to the narrow limits of a special function assigned to a special servant in the Lord's church?"

In reply, it should be observed that the context of First Timothy 3:8-13 is special, rather than generic. The fact that specific qualifications are given indicates that this is a special situation and not a generic one. For example, in First Timothy 3:12, Paul instructs that the deacons (*diakonoi*) be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. If Paul had been giving instructions in this passage concerning general Christian service, he would not have narrowed the scope to include only married men who had children. In the general sense of the word, one could be a faithful servant (*diakonos*) of Christ, even if he had no wife and no children. Therefore, the spe-

cific nature of the qualifications mentioned in this text, alert us to the fact that Paul is discussing special qualifications for a special position in the church. Men occupying this special position were called “deacons.”

Further proof of the technical usage of *diakonos* is found in Philippians 1:1, where Paul wrote “to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” No doubt, all the saints at Philippi were expected to be servants, and yet, Paul addresses a special class of deacons (*diakonois*) among the saints. Hence, we have observed that in a general sense, all Christians are *diakonos* in that they are to serve (Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 16:15; Rev. 2:19). The focus of this lesson, however, deals with *diakonos* in its more restricted sense of special servants, with special qualifications, with a special work to do.

### DEMANDS

Several years ago, the film *The Right Stuff* portrayed the quest of a number of men to become astronauts. The premise of the film was that not just anyone could walk into NASA and be selected to travel into outer space. To qualify for space travel and become an astronaut, you had to have “the right stuff.” It is equally true that not just anyone in the congregation is qualified to become a deacon. In order to be appointed as a deacon in the Lord’s church, you must possess “the right stuff.” In other words, God has set forth certain demands which must be met prior to becoming a deacon. A candidate for deacon must:

1. **Be Grave**—The Greek word is from *semnos*. It denotes one who is honorable, or respectable.<sup>2</sup> The term expresses “seriousness, gravity, dignity, . . . and describes the venerable and august qualities of a person . . . It refers especially to honorable conduct, a dignified and level-headed existence, and a high standard of morality.”<sup>3</sup> When Paul admonished the Philippians to think on whatsoever things are honorable (*semna*), he used a form of the same word used in First Timothy 3:8. Thus, a deacon is to be honorable in his conduct and serious in his approach toward the work of God. This does not mean that a man with a sense of humor could never become a deacon, nor does it imply that grouchiness is a prerequisite to appointment as a deacon. Rather, it suggests that a man who would become a deacon must not be giddy and light-hearted about matters that require serious attention.

2. **Hold The Mystery Of The Faith In A Pure Conscience**—Paul uses the Greek term for mystery (*musterion*) 21 times in his writings to refer, not to something complex and puzzling, but rather, to “God’s plan of providing salvation for men through Christ, which was once hidden, but now is revealed.”<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, Paul regularly refers to the gospel as the mystery (Eph. 1:9; 3:3-9; Col. 1:26-27). In fact, Paul mentions the “mystery of godliness” in the very context of his discussion about the qualifications of deacons (1 Tim. 3:16).

“The faith” is also equivalent to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such is its import in Acts 6:7 when a great company of priests were obedient to the faith (gospel). The phrase is used as a synonym for the totality of God’s written revelation (Jude 3). Hence, the man who would be a deacon must be a man who holds to the body of doctrine which is the written revelation of God, i.e., God’s Word, with a pure conscience. What is involved in holding to God’s Word with a pure conscience? It means that these men “were to be sincerely attached to the truth, and to realize its practical power in their life and experience.”<sup>5</sup> It means that “a deacon is to be a serious student of the Word of God. He is to possess the gospel as a part of his nature and living. He is to have knowledge of the gospel, and an understanding of the gospel, and he is to live the gospel in his life.”<sup>6</sup> Dub McClish explains,

To hold to the mystery of the faith means both to understand and be steadfast in the Truth. This requirement is parallel to “holding the faithful word” for elders (Titus 1:9). A man who is unsound in the faith must never be considered as a deacon, regardless of how kind, wealthy, or prominent he may be.<sup>7</sup>

In short, the man who would be a deacon must sincerely love the Word of God and live the Word of God.

3. **Be Tested And Found Blameless**—According to First Timothy 3:10, a man may not be installed as a deacon until he has first been tested and found blameless. This clearly implies the necessity of careful examination of men who would seek to serve the church as deacons. Sometimes people hold the erroneous notion that it is important to carefully scrutinize potential elders, but not nearly as important to analyze the lives of potential deacons. First Timothy 3:10 says otherwise. The verb translated “let these also first be proved” includes the Greek word *dokimazo*, which means “to test in hope of being successful.”<sup>8</sup> R. C. H. Lenski observes that this is Paul’s favorite term for

testing and that, in First Timothy 3:10, Paul uses the present imperative tense, implying that this is a testing which covers some time. Furthermore, this time of testing “does not indicate a period of probation, that men were tried out in the office before permanent appointment was made, but a constant testing so that, when deacons are later needed, such men may be nominated as candidates.”<sup>9</sup>

How long should this period of testing encompass? The Scripture does not say, but it is clear that the newly converted must not be rushed into service as a deacon. Many years ago, I preached for a congregation wherein the elders put forth several names before the congregation as potential deacons. I was greatly disturbed to hear some of the names which were put forth. One of the men they suggested for appointment had been out of the Baptist church for less than a year. In fact, he repeatedly called me “Pastor,” even after I lovingly corrected him about such. He was still saturated with certain denominational concepts about the church. He was nowhere near the point of being qualified to serve as a deacon.

The Divine Record says that a man must be found blameless before he can be appointed to serve as a deacon. But just what is meant by the term blameless in this passage? It most assuredly does not imply that the person must never have sinned, else no one could ever serve, for all are sinners (Rom. 3:23). The Greek word employed in this passage refers to “a person or thing against which no accusation can be made...respectability without reproach.”<sup>10</sup> It means that “prospective deacons are to be blameless in the sense that other, even mature, Christians cannot bring charges against them which can be substantiated.”<sup>11</sup> Brother Dub McClish also comments on the meaning of the word “blameless” in First Timothy 3:10,

I do not understand this to mean that a man must never have any accusation or criticism of any sort brought against him, for no man could pass such a test. Rather, he must be blameless in regard to the qualifications listed. When new deacons are being sought, it is the responsibility of any member of the church to step forward with any information regarding a man’s failure with respect to any of these qualifications. Sad experience teaches that it is much easier to “make a deacon” of one who is unqualified than to “unmake” one! The church is subject to grave harm when untested men are appointed as deacons.<sup>12</sup>

4. **Be The Husband Of One Wife**—God also demands that a man who would serve as deacon be the husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:12).

Since the qualifications of elders and deacons are dealt with extensively elsewhere in this volume, we will not take the time to investigate all of the possible interpretations of this phrase. However, we will simply observe that the passage requires a man who would serve as a deacon be a married man. A plethora of denominational expositors regard this qualification to mean that **if** the deacon is married, he is to be loyal to his one wife. They argue that Paul was doing nothing more or less than prohibiting polygamy. However, the words of the inspired apostle do not allow such a limited interpretation. In short, Paul's statement requires three things of the potential deacon: (1) that he be a married man, (2) that he not be a polygamist, and (3) that he not be unscripturally divorced and remarried.<sup>13</sup>

5. **Rule His Children And Own House Well**—As is the case with the elders (1 Tim. 3:4-5), the manner in which a man raises his children, and rules his household is a barometer of his potential to serve in the household of God. The father of a loving household would generally be a most suitable candidate to assist in serving the household of faith, and his well-ordered physical family would assist him in gaining respect and confidence from the spiritual family of God. On the other hand, it is impossible for a congregation to have confidence in a man whose family is ungoverned and out of control. Although deacons are not rulers over the church as elders are, it is still vital for the potential deacon to have his family under control. A man who cannot organize his own household will certainly fall short in helping to organize and implement some work of the household of God. "Only a man who is ambitious enough to work diligently at managing his home well is worthy of the work of managing certain areas of the work of the church."<sup>14</sup>

### DISQUALIFICATIONS

In addition to the five demands we have already studied, Paul's inspired pen succinctly lists three actions which would disqualify a man from being a deacon. They are listed together in First Timothy 3:8. Accordingly, a man who would be a deacon must:

1. **Not Be Double-tongued**—The Greek word employed here (*dilogous*) is found nowhere else in the New Testament. The word literally means "saying the same thing twice, speaking one thing and meaning another, deceitful in words."<sup>15</sup> The picture is of "one placed between two persons and saying one thing to one, another to the

other.”<sup>16</sup> In going about the business of serving the church, a deacon might have occasion to interact with a large number of families. In so doing, he must be careful not to talk out of both sides of his mouth in an effort to court the favor of each family in the congregation. It would be wrong for a deacon to adapt his position on a certain subject based upon the position of the people to whom he is talking. If a deacon vacillates back and forth, and practices the politics of telling people what they want to hear, it will eventually find him out, and all respect for him will be lost.

2. **Not Be Given To Much Wine**—Much has been made of the appearance of the word “much” in First Timothy 3:8 in light of its absence in First Timothy 3:3. The argument is made that Paul required elders to practice total abstinence from wine, but permitted deacons to imbibe moderate amounts. However, a closer look at the evidence reveals otherwise. Those who turn to this passage for “proof” of the acceptability of social drinking argue that Paul’s condemnation of being given too much wine should be construed as permission to be given to moderate amounts of wine. Such an argument, followed to its logical extreme, opens the door for all types of abuse.

For example, the Bible says, “Be not over much wicked” (Ecc. 7:17). Should we, therefore, conclude from this passage that God permits us to be moderately wicked, just as long as we don’t do it to excess? Likewise, if a father says to his child, “You must stop this constant cheating in school,” should we conclude that his statement implies acceptance of moderate and occasional cheating? Moreover, if someone pleads with young people not to become addicted to drugs, does that automatically communicate permission for them to use drugs in a limited, recreational fashion? When Paul admonished the Romans not to let sin reign in their mortal bodies (Rom. 6:12), did he thereby grant them permission to engage in moderate sinning? Obviously not! Neither did he intend for his prohibition to be construed as license to imbibe moderate amounts thereof.<sup>17</sup> The man who aspires to become a deacon must be a man of such moral character that he has no interest in intoxicating wine.

3. **Not Be Greedy Of Filthy Lucre**—The man who has an inordinate desire for money is disqualified from becoming a deacon. Paul warned Timothy of the dangers of covetousness in First Timothy 6:9-

17. D. Gene West explains the importance of the potential deacon being free from greed:

If he puts the making of money above all else, how can he be an example of seeking first the kingdom of God? He must sometimes make a choice between carrying out tasks assigned to him by the elders and the making of money. If he is covetous of money how can he serve Christ first? In financial matters he must be honest, upright, and above reproach. Deacons, by the nature of their responsibility, may sometimes be given large sums of money to work with. The church must be able to trust them to use the money wisely, getting value for every penny. They must be trusted not to pilfer, not to take kickbacks, etc. You cannot trust a man who is covetous of money. Deacons must be men of integrity and trust!<sup>18</sup>

Before passing on to our next main point, let us pause long enough to consider the following quotation written by Moses Lard in 1865. Lard does an excellent job of emphasizing the necessity of strict adherence to God's demands for those who would become elders or deacons.

My advice to every evangelist is to follow resolutely and undeviatingly the instruction of the New Testament in regard to the case; follow its instructions to the letter; and neither appoint nor suffer to be appointed with your consent, either to the office of overseer or that of deacon, a man who lacks *even one* of the qualifications prescribed for these offices respectively. In no case, nor on any account, must we venture to disregard the solemn decisions of Holy Writ. Yet I give it as my opinion that, in the matter of overseers and deacons, three out of every five of our churches are deeply at fault. We are scrupulous, and most justly so, in the matter of a man's faith; his repentance; his baptism; yet without one compunction of conscience or even the slightest seeming hesitancy, we appoint a man to the office of overseer who lacks one, and it may be half the prescribed qualifications. This is not right. Such overseers, no matter how excellent they may be as men, are, without a solitary exception, an injury to the church, and in many instances a curse. If a church flourishes under their rule, it is because it has in it elements of prosperity in spite of them, and not because it derives any aid from them. I lay it down as a position never to be controverted, that in so far only as a church conforms to every known requirement of Christ, will He bless it, and that so far precisely as it fails to do this will he hedge in its way and trouble it.<sup>19</sup>

## DUTIES

In answering the question of what duties deacons are required to discharge, Robert Milligan wrote, "This question will best be answered by referring to the occasion of their first appointment. This is given in Acts 6:1-7."<sup>20</sup> Milligan is not alone in his conviction that the initial appointment of deacons is recorded in Acts 6. Many commen-

tators believe that this passage provides us with a glimpse of the work of the first deacons. But, is this really the case? Let us consider the arguments from both sides. J. W. McGarvey strongly believed that the seven men chosen in Acts 6 were selected as the first official deacons. Consider his argument:

The title of the office here created is not given, and from this circumstance some scholars have failed to identify it with that of the deacon, mentioned in the first chapter of Philippians and the third chapter of First Timothy. But while the name of the office is absent, terms are used which show plainly that the office is the same. If the question had been one about ruling, and the seven had been chosen and appointed to rule, there could certainly be no hesitation about styling them rulers. The case before us is a perfect parallel. The question was about the “daily διακονίαν,” and the seven were chosen to διακονεῖν; why, then, hesitate to call them δίακονοι? Indeed, the verb διακονεῖν, here used to express the chief duty of the office, is the very one which in the third chapter of First Timothy is twice rendered in our version “serve as deacons.” Undoubtedly, then, it is the deacon’s office which was here first created, and supplied with incumbents.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, some have suggested that the men in Acts 6 could not possibly have been deacons because there were no elders in the church at Jerusalem at the time of their appointment. Some fear that admitting the existence of deacons before elders in Acts 6 would thereby authorize modern churches to appoint deacons without elders. However, the modern situation is not parallel to that of Acts 6. In Acts 6, there were living apostles who were guiding and governing the infant church in Jerusalem, including the seven men who were appointed to serve tables. Hence, even if we grant that the seven men in Acts 6 were official deacons in a church without elders, they still would have been deacons in a church **with inspired apostles**. In other words, admitting that the men of Acts 6 were official deacons would not mean that, in the absence of elders, the deacons would have been the overseers of the church at Jerusalem. They still would have served under the oversight of inspired apostles, a situation impossible to duplicate in our day. Thus, one could admit that the men in Acts 6 were “deacons” in a church without elders without having to admit that such is acceptable today. There is no authority for deacons to serve in churches without elders today; there also would be no one to oversee their work.

Were, therefore, the men of Acts 6 were “official deacons” of the Lord’s church? Not necessarily. Concerning that possibility, brother Dub McClish makes a keen observation:

Luke does not so refer to them. It is argued that the word for the serving they did is *diakonein* (v. 2). However, the word in the same context describing the “ministry” the apostles continued to render is also *diakonia* (v. 4). If the word in verse 2 makes the seven men “official” deacons, then the word in verse 4 makes the apostles such.<sup>22</sup>

Accordingly, because we have a strong desire to speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where it is silent, and call Bible things by Bible names, we must refrain from speaking of the men in Acts 6 as “official deacons,” for the Bible does not decisively speak of them as such.

But if Acts 6 is not a certain reference to church deacons, then where can we turn to find a job description for deacons? We can find a job description for deacons from First Timothy 3:10. After a man has been approved and appointed, Paul says that he is to “use the office of a deacon.” This English phrase is translated from a form of the Greek word *diakoneo*, which means “to be a servant, an attendant, a domestic, to serve, wait upon...to attend to anything, that may serve another’s interests.”<sup>23</sup>

Simply put, the job description of a deacon is to be a servant. A deacon is to serve in whatever area is assigned to him by the elders. The following is but a small sampling of some of the areas of service assigned to the deacons of the Southaven Church of Christ. It is by no means an exhaustive list. The job descriptions were drafted by the elders—Bill Pierce and Coleman Simpson. These areas include:

**Faith-In-Action Coordinator** (Congregational Visitation Program). Among other things, the deacon in charge of this program is to assist in the selection of team captains, prepare weekly team member visits, and attend weekly team meetings.

**Worship Participation Coordinator.** This deacon is responsible for the scheduling, organizing, supervising, and record administration of persons participating in various functions associated with the worship service, devotionals, and other activities. These functions include, but may not be limited to, opening prayer, closing prayer, presiding at the Lord’s table, serving at the Lord’s table, ushers, and door greeters.

**Treasurer.** This deacon’s duties include the receipt and distribution of funds, performance of associated administrative functions, in addi-

tion to other duties as assigned by the elders and agreed upon by the above deacon.

**Audio Tape and Tract Coordinator.** The deacon should (1) Maintain catalogued master copy of sermons, specific Bible classes, and radio programs. (2) Reproduce and distribute copies of above tapes to those who make requests. (3) Maintain adequate supply of audio tapes, tape boxes, labels, and other associated supplies. **Tracts:** (1) Select, read, and recommend sound tracts to the elders. (2) Order approved tracts. (3) Maintain display rack by keeping rack stocked, organized, and neat.

Other works include a **Benevolence Coordinator** and **Building Maintenance**. On and on the list could go, but such will suffice to demonstrate the wide variety of areas of service available to the deacon in the local church. The work of a deacon is to joyfully and willingly serve in whatever area would bless the congregation in its work for the Lord.

### DEVIATIONS

Tragically, man has deviated from God's inspired pattern concerning deacons. Consider just a few of these deviations.

1. **Elders are over the spiritual; Deacons are over the material**—There is not a particle of biblical evidence to support such a notion. In fact, the Bible declares that the elders are made overseers of **all** the flock. Furthermore, when the benevolent contribution was sent to Judea, it was not sent to the deacons, but rather to the elders (Acts 11:27-30). For all of his excellent scholarship, it is amazing to read J. W. McGarvey's position on the duties of deacons. He writes that God has given deacons the official duty of looking after the finances of the church. Now, if brother McGarvey had argued that deacons **could** serve by helping to look after the finances of the church, that would be one thing, but he dogmatically asserts that this specific duty was given to them by God. What verse in the New Testament teaches such a requirement or appointment? Moreover, brother McGarvey argues that one of the responsibilities of deacons is to tell people how much they are supposed to put into the collection plate on the first day of the week.<sup>24</sup> Again, where is the biblical support for such a view? Perhaps it stems from the misapprehension that elders are over the spiritual, while deacons watch over the material.

2. **Deacons are Junior Elders**—What a departure from Scripture is this notion! What book, chapter, and verse teaches such? Deacons are not necessarily “elders in the making.” It would be wonderful if they would become elders someday, but it is not a given that such will occur. Furthermore, deacons do not possess the right to band together to out-vote the elders on certain policy decisions. Elders shepherd; deacons serve.

3. **A Board of Deacons Rules Over The Church**—Such a concept comes from the fertile imaginations of men and women in denominationalism, and not from Holy Scripture. We read of deacons in the Bible, but no board of deacons. Hence, just because a denomination uses terms found in the Bible to refer to certain officials among them, does not guarantee that they are using these terms accurately. Denominations may talk of deacons, but not of the biblical order.

4. **Appointing Men As Deacons Merely To Honor Them**—The position of deacon is not to be given out as some sort of expression of gratitude for years of service rendered. The function of a deacon is not merely to have his name embossed on the church stationary, but rather to actually serve and assist others. If there is no actual work for the deacon to do; then he should never be appointed.

5. **Appointing Men As Deacons In Hopes That They Will Become Faithful**—We agree that “such an idea is just plain foolish.”<sup>25</sup> It is ridiculous to suppose that an unfaithful man will suddenly become faithful merely because a title has been bestowed upon him. They must first be proved before they can become deacons (1 Tim. 3:10).

6. **Appointing Women To Serve As Official Deaconesses Of The Church**—The idea stems from a misunderstanding of First Timothy 3:11 and Romans 16:1. It is argued that First Timothy 3:11 is a list of qualifications for women to serve in the church as deaconesses. Actually, a study of the context leads us to conclude that First Timothy 3:11 is a listing of qualifications for the wives of elders and deacons, and not for a separate class of female church officials. If First Timothy 3:11 does not refer to elders’ and deacons’ wives, then that would mean that not one thing was said in the totality of New Testament teaching regarding these special women. Most brethren realize how important these women are to their husbands in the work of the church. Knowing that the effectiveness of a potential elder or deacon

might be curtailed by an ungodly wife, God set forth qualifications for the wives of elders and deacons to meet.

But doesn't Romans 16:1 identify Phoebe as a deaconess in the church at Rome? The passage simply recognizes that she was a servant (*diakonon*) of the church at Rome. One might as well argue that the use of *diakonos* in Romans 13:4 proves that a government official is a deacon in the church as to argue that Phoebe was a church official on the basis of the use of *diakonon* in Romans 16:1. Besides, if it is so apparent that the term in Romans 16:1 is to be used in the technical sense of identifying a church official, why do the overwhelming majority of translators opt for the generic translation "servant" instead? Therefore, if women deacons are appointed, it is a deviation from the pattern of God's Word. Where is the record of a New Testament church appointing women deacons? All Christian women should be servants, but there is no evidence that they are to do so as official "deaconesses."

### DISTINCTIONS

According to First Timothy 3:13, some deacons will distinguish themselves by using "the office of a deacon well." Hence, a distinction exists between the deacons who serve well, and the deacons who do not. Those deacons who serve well, purchase to themselves a good degree (gain for themselves a good standing—ASV) and great boldness in the faith. How does the deacon who serves well gain for himself a good standing? Some have suggested that he does so by being promoted to the position of an elder. While it is true that many good elders once served as good deacons, that is not necessarily Paul's meaning. A deacon who serves well gains for himself a good standing in the sense that respect for him continues to grow.

### CONCLUSION

No church can be all that God wants it to be, without godly men serving diligently as deacons. When elders shepherd the flock, deacons serve, preachers preach, and members live out Christianity, the church flourishes. Thank God for deacons!

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert Milligan, *The Scheme Of Redemption* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1975), p. 338.

<sup>2</sup>Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *An Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 3:238.

<sup>3</sup>Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon Of The New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:244-245.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), p. 420.

<sup>5</sup>A. C. Hervey, "1 Timothy," *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 21:3:60.

<sup>6</sup>D. Gene West, *Studies In Timothy and Titus*, ed. David Lipe (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, 1986), p. 92.

<sup>7</sup>Dub McClish, *The Epistles Of I and II Timothy, Titus*, ed. Curtis Cates (Pensacola, FL: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1986), p. 103.

<sup>8</sup>Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 84.

<sup>9</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles To the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), pp. 597-598.

<sup>10</sup>Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary Of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), p. 923.

<sup>11</sup>Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary On 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus* (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1974), p. 60.

<sup>12</sup>McClish, p. 104.

<sup>13</sup>West, pp.94-95. For a more thorough discussion on the meaning of the phrase "husband of one wife," read the excellent volume on *The Elder and His Work*, by Robert R. Taylor, Jr., especially chapter eight.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, p. 95. For further discussion of whether a deacon is required to have a plurality of children in order to serve, study the material in this book on qualifications of elders and deacons, and also study Robert R. Taylor's chapter on this subject in the 1986 East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions book on Timothy and Titus.

<sup>15</sup>William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon To The Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), p. 149.

<sup>16</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1931), 4:574.

<sup>17</sup>For an excellent, and more thorough treatment of this qualification, consult Bobby Duncan's lecture on the subject in the book *Difficult Texts Of The New Testament Explained*, ed. Wendell Winkler (Hurst, TX: Winkler Publications, 1981), pp. 47-53.

<sup>18</sup>West, p. 93.

<sup>19</sup>Moses Lard, *Lard's Quarterly, 1864-1865*, p. 401.

<sup>20</sup>Milligan, pp. 339-340.

<sup>21</sup>J. W. McGarvey, *New Commentary On Acts Of Apostles* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, n.d.), pp. 106-107.

<sup>22</sup>McClish, p. 112.

<sup>23</sup>Thayer, p. 137.

<sup>24</sup>J. W. McGarvey, *J. W. McGarvey Sermons* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1974), pp. 275-276.

<sup>25</sup>Dan Fluornoy, *The Church of Christ*, ed. Maxie Boren (Bedford, TX: Precision Graphics, 1994), p. 256.

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# JESUS—GREAT EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

“For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:21-22).

By the apostle Peter we are informed that Christ left us an example that we are to follow His steps. When we follow Christ it is consoling to know that we are following one who “was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin” (Heb. 4:15). The Scriptures, in speaking of Jesus as a shepherd, say, “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice” (John 10:4). In Palestine, shepherds did not drive their sheep. The shepherds led; the sheep followed. As the sheep were not ahead of the shepherd, so Christians should not be ahead of Christ. Our Lord must be in the Lead. As sheep will recognize no voice but that of the shepherd, so Christians will recognize no voice of authority but that of Christ. Jesus is our copy, our pattern for our life. He is the matchless Leader of men.

The importance of leadership is recognized in every walk of life. In making a journey into a strange country one must have a guide. In military affairs nothing is more important than the leader. The leader

in governmental affairs is one of the main factors of success. If a guide is of such importance in the temporal walks of life, is he not much more important in the vital things of religion? In the temporal affairs of life one may be led in the wrong direction, and after failing once, or many times, he may try again and even succeed. But we live this life only once, we pass this way for the first and last time, and if it is a failure, all is lost (Heb. 9:27).

Our leader must be one that understands the way, can sympathize with man, and one that has been made perfect. "Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit" (Mat. 15:14). The fact that man is not able to guide himself in religion is expressed by the prophet of old: "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). There is so much at stake it seems that every intelligent being should be willing and anxious to search diligently for the proper leader.

### **SOME MEN WHO HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED AS LEADERS**

There are some whose names are found in secular history who have been accepted by many as their leaders. It would be well in our search to notice some of the outstanding ones.

Martin Luther came upon the scene at a time when such a man was needed. He showed himself to be courageous by opposing Catholicism and by openly defying the Pope. He succeeded in starting the move to place the Bible in reach of all the people. There is no doubt but that he did as great a work as could have been done by any man of his day. But with all the good things that can be said for him, we cannot afford to accept him as our leader through this life to the shores of eternity. He was an uninspired man and made mistakes. In trying to get so far from Catholicism, he took the stand that man is justified by faith only. This is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament: "Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith" (Jam. 2:24).

John Calvin, another remarkable character, did a great work. He called to the minds of the people the fact that God is supreme. He did much in getting many to reverence and respect God. Such is greatly needed even today. In view of the many good things in Mr. Calvin's life, and of his great learning, are we willing to be led in religion by him? He, too, was an uninspired man and subject to mistakes. He

taught that salvation on man's part is unconditional, that some will be lost and some saved without regard to their choice or deeds. The New Testament teaches: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

John Wesley did much to put spirituality into the worship during his life. Perhaps, there is nothing that is more needed in the church today than such lessons. The works of Mr. Wesley have been far-reaching. He was educated and well prepared for his work. Yet, Mr. Wesley, like the others, was a human being; and, as all human beings, subject to error. He organized certain societies for the purposes of carrying on the work that should have been done by the authority of Christ and only in His church. "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17).

During the time of much turmoil and confusion among the religious denominations of the world, Alexander Campbell came pleading for unity. He exalted Christ, striving to give Him the proper place in the minds of the people, as the head of the church. He did much in opposing error by public debate and by preaching from the pulpit. A greater work, perhaps, was never undertaken or more skillfully carried out. But, must we be subject to everything that he says and simply follow him all the way? No, for Mr. Campbell was also a man and was by no means sinless.

While we should pay our tribute or respect and honor those whose names have been mentioned, we must search elsewhere for a perfect leader. They were men, and man is a fallible being, not able to direct his own steps in religion.

We go to the Book of God. Abraham is one of the outstanding characters of the Bible. He obeyed God, leaving his home and going out as a stranger in a strange land. He was willing to offer his own son as a sacrifice to God. He is spoken of as the friend of God, the father of the faithful. But all of this does not qualify Abraham to be a perfect leader of humanity. He practiced deception while in Egypt (Gen. 12:11-19). Let us look for another!

God selected Moses to be the leader of the children of Israel to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. He was an able and courageous

leader. But he is not our deliverer from sin. Moses told the people that God would raise up a prophet like unto him (Moses), and that they must hearken unto this prophet (Deu. 18:15). Moses made a mistake in bringing forth water from the rock (Num. 20:10-20). While Moses was an Old Testament physical leader, we live in the Christian dispensation (Heb. 8:7-13). Thus, he cannot be our leader.

David was at one time selected as the king of God's people. He was a great leader, the sweetest and best king that Israel ever had. But we read of a terrible sin that David committed (2 Sam. 11:1-27). Therefore, he cannot ever be our perfect leader. We have no right to practice anything just because David practiced it.

In the New Testament, we read of John the Baptist's preaching. Many people responded to his invitation. John did not claim to be the promised leader. John said of Christ, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John pointed out the true leader when he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

The apostle Paul, another courageous leader of the New Testament said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

### CHRIST IS MAN'S PERFECT LEADER

Christ is the understanding, sympathetic, and perfect leader. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like *as we are, yet without sin*" (Heb. 4:15).

Christ, the perfect Leader, said: "If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mat. 16:24). To follow Christ is to accept and obey the teaching of Christ and the apostles. To believe, repent, confess and be baptized is to follow Christ. This is the teaching of both Christ and the apostles (Mat. 3:13-17; 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 2:38). We should follow Christ in wearing the name Christian (1 Pet. 4:15-16) and by living faithfully the Christian life. Jesus said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

Our leader is: **The Incomparable Christ**. He came from the bosom of the Father to the bosom of a woman. He put on humanity that we might put on Divinity. He became the Son of man that we might become sons of God. He came from Heaven where the rivers never

freeze, winds never blow, frosts never chill the air, and flowers never fade. They never phone for a doctor, for there no one is ever sick. There are no undertakers and no graveyard, for no one ever dies—no one is ever buried.

He was born contrary to the laws of nature, lived in poverty, reared in obscurity, and only once departed from the boundaries of Israel—in childhood. He had no wealth nor influence, and had neither formal training nor education. His relatives were inconspicuous and uninfluential.

In infancy, He startled a king; in boyhood, He puzzled the doctors; in manhood, He ruled the course of nature. He healed the multitudes without medicine, and made no charge for His services. He never wrote a book, yet not all the libraries of the country could hold the books that could be written about Him.

He never wrote a song, yet He has furnished the theme of more songs than all song writers combined. He never founded a college, yet all the schools together cannot boast of as many students as He has. He never practiced medicine, yet He has healed more broken hearts than doctors have broken bodies.

He never marshaled an army, drafted a soldier, nor fired a gun. Yet no leader ever made more volunteers who have, under His orders, made rebels stack arms or surrender without a shot being fired.

He is the Star of Astronomy, the Rock of Geology, the Lion and the Lamb of Zoology, the Harmonizer of all discords, and the Healer of all diseases. Great men have come and gone, yet He lives on. Herod could not kill Him, Satan could not seduce Him, death could not destroy Him, the grave could not hold Him.

He laid aside His purple robe for a peasant's gown. He was rich, yet for our sake, He became poor. How poor? Ask Mary! Ask the Wise men! He slept in another's manger. He cruised the lake in another's boat. He rode on another's donkey. He was buried in another's tomb.

The ever perfect One—He is the Chief among ten thousand. He is altogether lovely.

### **THE LEADERSHIP OF CHRIST CARRIES WITH IT A NUMBER OF IMPLICATIONS**

To follow our Leader, Christ, we must be **teachers**. Paul, Peter, and others learned to lead when they learned to follow the Lord (1 Cor. 11:1). It is when we learn to follow that we learn to lead. Christ is our

example as a teacher. His is preeminently a teaching religion. “They shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:45). Jesus taught so simply that the common people could understand (Mark 12:37). To follow the Great Teacher is to be acquainted with the Scriptures and know the difference between faith, opinion, and custom. A Christian is to make known the wisdom of God in a world of ignorance (Eph. 3:10-11). He is to provide illumination in a world of darkness (Eph. 5:8; Phi. 2:15). When followers of Christ are strong and teach His Word, marvelous things happen in the church of our Lord!

Jesus is our example in **joy**. Despondency and gloom are as incompatible with Christianity as cold is to heat and as death is to life. Jesus told His disciples that they would be persecuted even unto death, but they should “rejoice, and be exceedingly glad” because of the great reward awaiting them in heaven (Mat. 5:12).

Jesus is our copy in **purity**. He taught, “Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Mat. 5:8). There must be a spiritual life (Rom. 8:5-6; 1 Cor. 3:1). What a contrast to worldliness, greed, lust, covetousness, immorality, hatred, strife, selfishness, envy, malice, and other forms of ungodliness that we see in some church members today! Can you imagine the Christ, our Leader, telling dirty stories, cursing, and ordering beer or a glass of whiskey?

Jesus is our pattern in **love**. He taught that man should love God supremely; He set a perfect pattern for us (Mat. 22:37; John 15:9). We should follow Him in love. He loved all mankind, even those who hated Him. Our Leader had a universal love; He died for the world and He loves all sinners. He hates sin, but loves the sinner. He loved the Jewish race. He was of the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14); His personal ministry was among the Jews. He had a tender love for this race and wept over it (Mat. 23:37). He loved the temple as the place of worship (Mat. 21:13; Luke 4:16). He loved His disciples and called them His friends (John 15:15). His love was unbounded for He was a friend to all, but only those who meet Him in His own high and holy terms are His friends. He loved His disciples to the end (John 13:1). He was friendly even to Judas—even after Judas betrayed Him (Mat. 26:50). He loved Mary and Martha (John 11:5). He loved Lazarus (John 11:3). He loved the young ruler (Mark 10:21). He loved Peter (Luke 22:31). He loved John (John 13:23). He loves you! We should

imitate Him in loving mankind! As Christians we should keep love alive in a world of hate (Mat. 5:43-47). He also said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23). His sympathy was not the kind that said, "I am sorry for you." His sympathy went into action and did something about the situation. Do we have the same disposition? Let us follow Him!

Consider also His **compassion** for those in need. "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd" (Mat. 9:35-36). We need to show compassion toward those in physical need, bodily or mental distress, as well to those in religious error. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35). Paul exhorts us to rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep (Rom. 12:15). It is easy to do the first, but not to do the second. But to visit and sympathize with people in time of their sorrow often results in the saving of their souls. Let us be useful in our Leader's cause!

We are to follow Jesus, our Leader in **meekness, gentleness, and forbearance**. Meekness denotes gentleness and forbearance for the weakness and errors of others (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Jesus suffered wrong but was not vengeful and did not retaliate. Our Leader prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father...not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Like our Leader, we must be meek and humble before God.

Our Example taught **forgiveness** and practiced it. Christ in His earthly life stands out as the most glorious personality in history. He taught a doctrine of unlimited forgiveness upon one's repentance. "Then came Peter and said to him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven" (Mat. 18:21-22). Jesus declared forgiveness of sins to men and astonished the Pharisees by His act of forgiveness of His murderers (Luke 23:34). In Christ as "the Son of man," men saw the fulfillment of the highest ideal which His nation had ever been able to conceive. God requires forgiveness on the part of man. We must become like Christ in exercising forgiveness. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your tres-

passes” (Mat. 6:14-15). When we exercise forgiveness, we become like Christ.

To be like Christ, our Leader, we must be in full time **service in the vineyard of Christ**. We must be active and aggressive people. No one can stand in idleness. All must abide in Christ: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4). If we abide in Christ, it means that we will walk in faith, purity, and uprightness. Listen to John: “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6). A person who carries envy, hatred, jealousy, and ill will toward his brother is not walking as He walked; therefore, he is not abiding in Christ. The person whose life is impure, who uses profane language, and defrauds his fellowman, is not walking as He walked; therefore, he is not abiding in Christ. A man that neglects the work of the Lord is not walking as Jesus walked, for He put the will of His Father first. Therefore, that man is not abiding in Christ. To abide in Christ means, to think as He thought, work as He worked, and be faithful as He was faithful. Our Leader condemns idleness (Rom. 2:11; 1 The. 4:11; 2 The. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:13; Heb. 6:12).

What are the results of failing to abide? “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6). What a horrible thought: wither, die, burn for ever more. The severed branch has no source of life: therefore, it must perish and be burned. Friend, are you abiding in Christ? Think seriously: life is short, death is certain, and the judgment awaits us all.

We should become like Christ in **praying** to God. Jesus did not need to pray for guidance; He knew the Father’s will. He did not need to pray for help to obey. “I do always the things that please my Father.” And yet Jesus prayed often. He has taught us to pray, and we cannot become like Him if we do not pray. He said: “Pray for them that despitefully use you” (Luke 6:28).

Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any one; that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses (Mark 11:24-25).

He taught men a model prayer which is mistakenly called “the Lord’s prayer,” and He taught them that “they ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). The earthly life of Jesus is a school of prayer with an invitation to every disciple to enter this school.

### **A THREEFOLD JOY IN FOLLOWING OUR LEADER**

To those who follow the Saviour with a cheerful submission and an undeviating obedience, there is given a threefold joy. First, there is the joy of forgiveness. We have great joy in knowing that our sins are all forgiven; our guilt has all been washed away. This divine blessing has been made sure to us by the infallible Word of God. This is not left to conjecture, based upon mere feelings, emotions, or human traditions. Instead we are able to “read our title clear to mansions in the skies,” from the blessed Word of Him to whom we must look for this inestimable blessing. We have a marvelous joy when we are able to take the New Testament, turn to the “Acts of the Apostles,” read those cases of conversion recorded there, and put ourselves and our own conversion into the place in the narrative of the person or persons converted. What they heard and believed, we heard and believed; what they did, we did; the purpose for which they did it, being the purpose for which we did the same thing. Then, what is equally important, to be able to say that where they stopped, we stopped, knowing that the Lord will be satisfied with us just as He was with them. Friends, there is no joy like the joy that comes into the heart of him who obeys the gospel. Likewise, there would be no anxiety like the anxiety of one who, when he reads the Word of the Lord, finds his own religious experiences different to the examples left on record for us.

There is also given to those who follow the Master as their pattern of submission and obedience the joy of free and unfettered service. Sin has no more dominion over those who are Christ’s: its bondage has been broken, the captives have been freed. They, as sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father, are now willingly obedient, following the divine pattern, finding it to be their meat to do the will of the Father and finish His work, thus receiving great joy. These will not allow trial nor difficulty in doing the Lord’s will to detract from their joy. They are able to say with the apostle Paul: “Yea, and if I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all” (Phi. 2:17).

Third, he has the joy of an undoubting expectancy. The future, to the Christian, holds everything that is really valuable, and with him there is no doubt that every promise of God will be fulfilled. “For how many soever be the promises of God, in him [that is, in Christ] is the yea: wherefore also through him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us” (2 Cor. 1:20). The Christian, then, looks to the future with a joy that only an undoubting expectancy could produce—a joy that cannot be dimmed by toil, adversity, deprivation, and even death. Like Moses of old, “he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27).

### CONCLUSION

If we permit Christ to lead us while we live here, He will be our Leader when the human hand is too weak to lead. We can say in the words of the sweet singer of Israel:

The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever (Psa. 23).

# MOSES—GREAT EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a vitally important subject; it involves guiding, inducing to follow a line of action by persuasion or example, acting as chief, directing, governing, commanding, directing the operations of. Thus, when we speak of leadership, we are speaking of the act or state of direction, government, commanding, etc.

## THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP

Leadership is necessary in every aspect of our lives and within the Lord's church. We see an illustration of the need for leadership in the sports arena. Without a leader a sports team would fall apart, only confusion would reign. Many coaches or managers today are fired because they do not provide the necessary leadership to take the team to the championship. We have CEOs, presidents, and chairmen of the board to provide leadership for a company. Without such, a business would flounder and eventually fail. There is a category of software

(organizational charts) whose whole purpose is to draw the organization (leadership) within a company.

There is also the need for good leadership within the church. We do have a great leader and one that is well qualified in Jesus. Peter declares, “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 5:4). Paul informs us that God “hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23; cf., Col. 1:18). Our Chief Shepherd placed shepherds under Him to take care of His flock within the local congregation. These under-shepherds must meet the qualifications given by God in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. However, we can learn many principles of leadership by observing the examples God gives of men who were great leaders. One such leader was Moses. He is mentioned in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament character; thus, he is worthy of our consideration.

## MOSES' ATTRIBUTES

### Desire

The children of Israel had gone into Egypt during the time of Joseph. While there, they became a great people, a nation. There arose another Pharaoh that did not know Joseph (Exo. 1:8). He placed the Israelites under taskmasters and made them slaves. For this situation to be changed, and to take them to the promised land, a leader was needed. Moses was willing to take upon himself the responsibility of leading the children of Israel. With an interest in leading the Hebrews, Moses went out to “look on their burdens” (Exo. 2:11). While he was among his brethren, he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew and slew him.

And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known (Exo. 2:13-14).

Stephen shows us the import of this passage when he says by inspiration, “For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not” (Acts 7:25). While Moses ran ahead of God’s timetable, he still had the desire to lead.

Moses sought to take the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage and to that promised land. This leadership would carry great responsibility. Moses was willing to take that responsibility upon himself. Many simply are not willing to take the responsibility of leadership within the Lord's church. They know that those who take a leading role will receive a stricter judgment. "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation [a stricter judgment—NKJV]" (Jam. 3:1).

Often, members of congregations make matters worse by murmuring and complaining against those who take a leading role. We have burnt preacher and song leaders for Sunday lunch. When elders make decisions, we always know better and often try to subvert the authority of the elders by our complaints. When we do such things, we quench the desire of those who are leaders and those who would become such.

### Trained

Moses was trained for leadership for eighty years prior to actually taking the leadership role of the Hebrews. He was trained first in Egypt, then in Midian. Moses, during the first forty years, received his training in Pharaoh's house as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). "The priestly caste in Egypt was noted for its knowledge of science, astronomy, medicine, and mathematics; this reputation was proverbial. (1 Kings 4:30)."<sup>1</sup>

While in Midian, Moses would have received some great lessons preparing him to lead the children of Israel. He learned what it was to be a stranger in a strange land. Christians today are strangers passing through this life to a greater life. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). He became a shepherd while in Midian.

He was to be shepherd of Israel. A man's being a shepherd of his own family helps prepare him to shepherd God's people. I think this is one of the reasons for the qualifications stated in First Timothy 3. One who cannot shepherd his own family in their spiritual development is not suitable to be a shepherd over God's people, where one's prime work would be to help them to grow spiritually.<sup>2</sup>

We must start training men from an early age to be leaders within the Lord's church. We have seen the need to properly train young

men to become gospel preachers and are doing an excellent job in that work; but what about training men to be elders and deacons within the Lord's church? We also need to start this training early in life. Far too often when someone reaches an age when he could be considered for leadership, he has done things in his life that disqualify him from this type of service.

### Courageous

Moses was a man of great courage. At the point in his life which God called Moses, he was a shepherd. God instructed him to go to Pharaoh and say for Him, "Let my people go." However, Egypt was one of, if not the strongest, world power of that day, and Pharaoh was its absolute monarch. It would take a great amount of courage to go in to Pharaoh with such a demand. Moses realized this when he asked God, "And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that **I should go unto Pharaoh**, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exo. 3:11). God promises His aid and companionship to Moses to strengthen him. "Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain" (Exo. 3:12). Additionally, Moses often had to go against the people he was leading. They were a rebellious people, both against God and against Moses. Moses had the courage to stand for God and right in spite of their opposition and rebellion. Lesser men would have turned things over to someone else or given in to the wishes of the people instead of doing God's will.

Any leader today must possess this quality of mind which enables one to face dangers, difficulties, threats, or pain, without fear, but with bravery or boldness. Without courage a leader would not be able to make the tough decisions. People will often want to go in ways that are not best or God-ordained. Leaders must have the courage to stand up and do what is right—no matter what the opposition. All people, including leaders like Moses, have God's promise that He will be with us, as long as we are doing His will.

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5-6).

Thus, all Christians should remember that “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). *Fear* in this passage means timidity or cowardice. Leaders particularly must remember these facts and be courageous.

### **Willingly Accepted Suffering**

The Holy Spirit states of Moses: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25). Moses never would have chosen to suffer affliction if he did not possess the character of courage. Elders and leaders in the church of our Lord will suffer affliction. They must be prepared to and understand that affliction will come. They, then, must suffer willingly. However, all Christians will suffer persecution. “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). When elders take a stand against evil and false doctrine, they will suffer for it. They will be ridiculed, ostracized, and sometimes even face physical persecution and loss of life because of their defense of truth. But, sadly, they will also face affliction from their own brethren. Elders will make decisions that members will not like. Many will willingly and lovingly obey God by submitting to their decisions. However, there are some ungodly members (who care more for self than the church of our Lord) who will persecute them unmercifully. Thus, elders must be prepared and learn to willingly accept affliction for the cause of Christ.

### **Meek**

This might seem contradictory to the previous quality of courage. Many equate meekness with timidity or weakness. While Moses was courageous, we also read, “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). This statement was made in the midst of a rebellion against Moses by Aaron and Miriam which Moses had to quell. Moses did not resent the accusations made against him. Instead his concern was their rebellion against God (by rebelling against God’s delegated authority). His interest was in their salvation. Miriam was stricken with leprosy in Numbers 12:10. Aaron, upon seeing Miriam, confessed their sin. Moses then cried unto God to heal her. After following God’s instructions to put her out of the camp for seven days, God answered Moses’ prayer.

Meekness is strength brought under control—self-control. Humility and obedience are sometimes used to help us understand meekness. Moses had the God-given right to lead and speak for God. When they rebelled, instead of looking upon self and self-interests, Moses controlled himself and looked upon the interests of others. “The meek person is not interested in defending himself, but rather in trying to do whatever may be necessary to reach out and to save one who is walking down the road to ruin.”<sup>3</sup>

While looking at the interests of others, the leader who is meek will also be humble. When God called Moses, He reminded him that the people belonged to God, not Moses. Then God informs Moses that He would deliver the people and that Moses was only the instrument of their deliverance.

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Exo. 3:7-8).

Because Moses was meek and would humble himself under God, he was able to accept the position God gave him. Elders must realize that the church belongs to God. They must humble themselves under the hand of God. They are simply instruments of God to work in His service.

### **Delegated Responsibility**

A leader is to lead—not do everything himself. After bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses tried to judge the people by himself. Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, told him what he was attempting to do was not good, and he would wear away. Upon Jethro’s advice Moses began delegating that responsibility.

And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves (Exo. 18:25-26).

Too many times elders do not know how to organize work and delegate responsibility to others. They often want to try to do everything themselves. That is not leadership. An effective leadership must be

men that work, but they must know how to motivate and encourage other people to engage in the work that they have planned. Problems arise when the elders try to do everything themselves without involving others in the work or simply make decisions, announce them, and expect the church to accept them and carry them out. Thus, the membership remains inactive. Elders must practice the principles that lead to good organization, planning, and motivation in carrying on the Lord's work.

### Cooperative

A man who is not willing to cooperate with others and feels he must do it all will never delegate responsibility to anyone else. Moses was a man willing to work with others. For example, in the battle with Amalek recorded in Exodus 17 Moses delegated the responsibility of leadership to Joshua. Moses stood on the mountain with the rod of God in his hand. While he held his hands in the air, Israel prevailed; however, when he dropped his hands, Amalek prevailed. Moses allowed Aaron and Hur to help him in holding up his hands, thus showing a cooperative spirit for the accomplishing of a great victory.

Likewise, elders must remember that we are to cooperate with others in accomplishing the work of God. "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9). "We then, *as* workers together *with him*, beseech *you* also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1). Failure of elders to work with others will only lead to the discouragement of those who need to be working in the Lord's vineyard.

### Just

Moses was concerned with justice.

And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear *the causes* between your brethren, and judge righteously between *every* man and his brother, and the stranger *that is* with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; *but* ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment *is* God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring *it* unto me, and I will hear it (Deu. 1:16-17).

Hear again,

Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deu. 16:18-19).

Moses knew that God is a just God and, thus, demands justice from man.

Elders will often be called upon to make decisions. They must not be respecters of persons, instead they must make decisions that are just. They are to “judge righteously.” It is easy to side with one person or group because of background, association, previous work or life, or for any number of reasons. Elders cannot allow personal connections to influence their decisions. They must seek out the facts and render their decision based solely upon them, which is not always the popular course, but it is the right course.

### **Approachable**

Moses was “approachable” in that when others came to him, he would listen. The time when Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came to visit aptly illustrates this (Exo. 18). Jethro saw Moses attempting to judge all the people. He went to him and suggested that he delegate the responsibility to others and that he only take the most difficult cases. “So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said” (Exo. 18:24).

Knowledge and wisdom does not begin and end with elders, although some seem to think so. Job sarcastically said of his *friends*, “No doubt but ye *are* the people, and wisdom shall die with you” (Job 12:2). Wisdom did not die with his friends; it continued. Likewise, today people other than elders have knowledge and wisdom. Elders must learn to be approachable and listen to the knowledge and wisdom of others prior to making decisions. This quality is also important so people will come to the elders with their problems and concerns—not murmur and complain behind their back. Additionally, when people have personal problems and need counseling or advice, they need to feel comfortable coming to the elders of the church. People today need to learn to look to the elders, not the preacher. Elders need to encourage individuals to come to them and provide an atmosphere where people will.

### **Caring**

Moses cared for the people he was leading. We first see this nature in Moses when he went out unto his brethren and saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew. Because of his concern for the people, he slew the

Egyptian (Exo. 2:11-14). Later, the people called upon Aaron to make them gods. After he makes the golden calf, God speaks to Moses.

And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people (Exo. 32:9-14).

Moses would never have interceded for the people if he did not care for them. We see another occasion that God was going to destroy the people, but Moses interceded. When the spies returned from examining the land, ten of the twelve gave a negative report that they could not take the land. The people wept and charged God with bringing them into the land to die. God determined to destroy this rebellious nation and raise up a nation from Moses who again interceded for the people (Num. 14:11-20). Only because of his great love and care for the people of God would he choose to suffer affliction with them than “enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25).

Good leaders must have a care and concern for the people they lead. It is the elders’ responsibility to care or tend the flock—especially in watching for our souls. “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). If a person does not care about us, how can we trust him to “watch for [our] souls”? Jesus describes the good shepherd as one who will lay down his life for the sheep. Elders who do not care for the flock of God that is among them are nothing more than hirelings.

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep (John 10:11-13).

Elder, deacon, preacher, Bible class teacher, would you give your life for the flock? Effective leaders must care for the sheep. If they do not care, members can tell and will distrust them, thus hindering the cause of Christ.

### Humble

Peter wrote,

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time (1 Pet. 5:5-6).

James wrote basically the same, “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jam. 4:6-7). These, along with many other passages, show our need to humble ourselves under God—that is to submit to or obey the Lord’s will. Moses was a man who exemplified humility. When God called him (Exo. 3-4), while he offered excuses, he did what God said, and humbled himself under God’s mighty hand. All through the time Moses led the children of Israel, he did what God said, always giving glory to Him. Even when the Lord told him that he would not be able to go into the land of promise because of his sin (Num. 20), and later when he was on Mount Nebo and God showed him all the land prior to his death (Deu. 34), still there was only submission to the Lord’s will.

Likewise, leaders today must first learn to humble themselves under God and His revealed will. If they expect brethren to follow their lead, they must demonstrate that they can follow, and especially that they are following God. The other side of humility is pride and pre-eminence. Those who are not humble become like Diotrephes. “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not” (3 John 9). This type of person cares nothing for the flock; they are only out for self. The humble person cares about God, His will, and those under his care. They will truly watch for men’s souls (Heb. 13:17) instead of looking out for self. Thus, it is no wonder that Paul, in giving the qualifications for a bishop, says that he must not be self-willed (Tit. 1:7).

## Did Not Care Who Got The Credit

Moses was not concerned with personal glory and honor. When he went in to Pharaoh, he did not call the people his own, but they were God's people. In the plagues, Moses always acted for God and allowed God to have the credit. When Pharaoh would call Moses in to ask for a plague to be removed, he asked him to "intreat the LORD" on his behalf. Moses always realized that the people belonged to God and that he was only an instrument God was using.

Leaders today must not be self-seeking. They, like Moses, must recognize that they are simply an instrument for God to use and carry out His purpose. They must be like Paul in giving God the glory. "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

If leaders today are out for their own glory, they will not work with others, nor delegate authority or responsibility to others. These types of individuals will not be interested in giving God glory—they are too selfish. Leaders must also be willing to delegate responsibilities to others and then allow them to receive the credit their work deserves. If a leader takes the credit for work of others, he will only discourage future work. Giving others the credit, even if their part was small and the leader did most of the work, will encourage them to great work.

## OBSTACLES TO LEADERSHIP

### Some Did Not Want To Follow

All during Moses' leadership, there were some that did not want to follow him. One illustration of such is found immediately after they had been delivered from Egypt.

And they said unto Moses, Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? *Is* not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For *it had been* better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness (Exo. 14:11-12).

Other occasions would be the different rebellions against Moses and his authority. Did this mean that Moses should resign his leadership position? Should Moses have asked all the people if they wanted him to continue being their leader and if they approved of the job he was

doing? God made Moses the leader. When the people rebelled or disapproved, God powerfully showed the people His choice.

Elders are made overseers of the church today by the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). It is our responsibility to follow the lead of the elders. When we rebel against them, then we have rebelled against God’s designated authority. If some are rebellious, that does not mean that the elders should resign or ask to be reconfirmed, as some congregations are now practicing. If some decisions prove to be unpopular, members should nevertheless humbly submit to the elders’ decisions, and the elders must continue to lead.

This same principle is true regarding our Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25). Most people have decided they do not want to follow Him. Yet, God has never called upon man to “re-confirm” Him as their Savior. Jesus has never offered to step down as Chief Shepherd because people did not like the decisions He made. People must be taught to humbly submit to and obey His commands, whether they like them or not.

### **Constant Murmuring And Complaining**

After only three days journey into the wilderness, the people started complaining and murmuring against Moses, asking, “What shall we drink?” (Exo. 15:24). This murmuring continued through Moses’ leadership. The book of Numbers could be called the book of Murmuring. In chapter eleven the people murmured because of the length of the way and because they were tired of the manna. Chapter twelve records the complaining of Aaron and Miriam. The next two chapters (Num. 13-14) reveal the grumbling of the people after the report of the spies. In chapter sixteen we have the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. After they had been put to death, “on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD” (Num. 16:41). In Numbers 20 it happened again; the people were without water; thus they complained. Last, in Numbers 21, the people murmured while they were in the land of Edom. Yet none of these incidents stopped. Moses from his appointed work of leading the people; he stuck to the job.

It is surprising that the children of Israel would complain in this way after seeing the mighty works of God. They had been redeemed from slavery by God bringing supernatural plagues against the Egyptians. After they had been released, they came to the Red Sea where God separated the waters to allow them to pass through on dry ground. After all of God's care, why would they murmur? One of the reasons is that they were interested in ease and comfort. Selfish ease is one of the reasons for murmuring in the Lord's church today. A second reason was their failure to grasp the true meaning of discipleship. "The Israelites did not understand their mission and the value of the things that God had provided for them. The cure for their murmuring and complaining was trust in God."<sup>5</sup> This is the same cure for so many troubles in the church today. Leaders in the church of Christ must teach Christians to place their trust in all that God has said.

### RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEADERSHIP

Inherent in *leadership* is to lead. *To lead* indicates someplace to be led. God selected Moses to be the leader of the children of Israel. He had the responsibility of taking the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage and leading them to the promised land. Elders are God's leaders in the church today. They have a certain responsibility to both God and those whom they lead. That responsibility concerns the spiritual welfare of those under their care. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is unprofitable for you*" (Heb. 13:17). Elders are to tend, watch, guide, and protect, in order to lead us to heaven. Elders are going to give an account as to how they have done their job in getting the souls under their care to heaven.

### CONCLUSION

Moses was one of the greatest men in history. He was a great leader—the person God chose to lead His people. As we study his life and work, we learn great principles of leadership. As Moses led those under his charge, elders must lead those under their charge to faithfully work in the Lord's kingdom.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1948), pp. 107-108.

<sup>2</sup>Franklin Camp, *Principles and Perils of Leadership* (Birmingham, AL: Roberts & Son, Inc.), p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>4</sup>I do not mean in some mystical or miraculous way. The Holy Spirit has established the qualifications and set forth the work elders are to do. He does this through the revelation of the Scriptures. As a man meets the qualifications, is scripturally appointed, and fulfills the work established by the Holy Spirit; he is made an overseer by the Spirit.

<sup>5</sup>Camp, p. 125.

# JOSHUA—GREAT EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

From the top of Pisgah, over against Jericho, God showed Moses all the land of Gilead and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah unto the hinder or western sea, and the South, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar (Deu. 34:1-4). This was the land God had sworn to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and to their seed (Gen. 12:1-3), a land He had “searched out” for His people, a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands (Eze. 20:6). To Moses, God said, “I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither” (Deu. 34:4). Subsequent to the death of Moses, the leadership of God’s people passed to Joshua. The responsibility of leadership was now his, and what a tremendous task it was. But why did God choose Joshua? Probably for the same reasons He chose Abraham (Gen. 18:19), David (2 Sam. 16:1-12), and Paul (Acts 9:11-15). Of Abraham, God said, “For I have known him” (Gen. 18:19). This was obviously the case with Joshua, David, and Paul. God knew their “downsittings, their uprisings, and their thoughts afar off (cf., Psa. 139:1-2).

## THE MAN JOSHUA

He was of the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8). The Grecianized form of his name is “Jesus.” In that he led his people into the Promised Land, he may have been a prototype of his Greater Successor, who is leading His own into the Promised Land of Heaven. Joshua had been a personal attendant of Moses throughout the 40 years of wilderness wandering. Was with Moses in the Mount (Exodus 24:13). Was one of the Twelve Spies (Numbers 13:8,16). Josephus says he was 85 when he succeeded Moses. Is thought to have been about 6 years subduing the land; and the rest of his life, settling and governing the twelve tribes; his rule over Israel, in all, covering about 25 years. He died at 110, and was buried in Timnath-serah, in Ephraim. He was a great warrior, disciplined his forces, sent spies, but prayed, and trusted in God.<sup>1</sup>

### LEADERSHIP IS NOT OPTIONAL

Leadership cannot be looked upon with disinterest or indifference. It is not optional. If it were, we would be free to do that which is right in our own eyes (Jud. 17:6), but God has never allowed His people to do this. If leadership is optional, “everybody’s business is nobody’s business.” Subsequent to the death of Moses, God spoke to Joshua and instructed him in matters pertaining to Israel’s entrance into the land of Canaan (Jos. 1:1-2). The Israelites would never have crossed the Jordan, much less entered the land of promise without leadership. Things do not get done unless someone is appointed to take the lead. Take, for instance, an incident that occurred in the early days of the church (Acts 6). The number of disciples was rapidly multiplying, so much so that the Grecian Jews (Hellenists who lived outside Palestine, but spoke the Greek language) murmured against the Hebrews, those who were of pure Jewish blood and spoke the Hebrew language (cf., Phi. 3:5), because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration (a daily distribution of needed things). The twelve could have completely overlooked the problem and refused to deal with it, but they did not. Instead, they called the multitude together and gave instructions regarding the situation. The problem was solved, but it would not have been without the leadership of the twelve. Leadership is not optional.

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

In Joshua Chapter One, concerning The Book of The Law in Israel’s possession, God charged Joshua to do all that was written therein. God’s law was to be meditated upon day and night; it was not to

depart out of his mouth. Only by so doing could Joshua prosper and have good success (Jos. 1:8). It was to be his personal responsibility to cause the people to inherit the land which God said, "I swear unto their fathers to give them" (Jos. 1: 6). In Chapter Two, Joshua sends out spies secretly to view Jericho and the land (Jos. 2:1). These spies meet Rahab who by faith "perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb. 11:31). Rahab is the ancestress of Boaz, David, and Christ (Mat. 1:5). Chapter Three records the crossing of the Jordan. When the priests, who bore the ark, came to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, they were to stand still (Jos. 3:8). When the feet of the priests were dipped in the brink of the water, the water which came down from above stood, and rose up in one heap, a great way off, at Adam (Jos. 3:15-16). Israel consequently passed over the Jordan on dry ground, even as their forefathers had crossed the Red Sea (cf., Exo. 14:22).

In Chapter Four, memorial stones (two piles of them) were set up, one in the Jordan (Jos. 4:9), and the other at Gilgal (Jos. 4:20). These stones were to serve as a sign to future generations for ever (Jos. 4:7). In Chapter Five, God's passover is kept (Jos. 5:10), and the act of circumcision was performed since the people who were born in the wilderness had not yet been circumcised (Jos. 5:5). Chapter Six records the fall of Jericho, both the walls and the city. Chapters Seven and Eight records the capture of Ai and Bethel. Chapter Eight contains the recording of the law at Mount Ebal.

Chapters Nine and Ten record one of the most celebrated miracles ever performed: the Sun stood still, and the moon stayed. Chapter Eleven details the defeat of the kings of the North. Chapter Twelve provides a list of kings who were destroyed. Chapters Thirteen through Twenty-Two describe the division of the inherited land. Chapters Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four contain Joshua's farewell address, the last words of which were, "as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Jos. 24:15). Halley says,

The main urge of Joshua's final address was against idolatry. Canaanite idolatry was such an aesthetic combination of religion with free indulgence of fleshly desire that only persons of exceptional strength of character could withstand its allurements.<sup>2</sup>

## LEADERSHIP REQUIRES TRAINING

### The Twelve Apostles

The twelve disciples are a prime example of leadership achieved through training. They were nothing more than common men who earned their living from tent making, fishing, and tax collecting; but they turned the first century world upside down after they were properly trained. Our Lord was an incomparable leader of men. He saw the multitudes that followed Him and was moved with compassion; because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep having no shepherd (Mat. 9:36). From the multitudes who followed Him (Mat. 4:25-5:1) Christ separated twelve men with whom He personally associated for some forty-two months. During this time our Lord prepared them for the greatest encounter of their lives. They had sat at His feet and learned, imbibed His spirit, and now they were prepared to imitate His example. Consequently, when the Lord told them to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), they were ready. They had been trained to face a hostile, unbelieving world. In like manner, Joshua had sat at the feet of the great Lawgiver (Mat. 5:17), he had imbibed the spirit of the great Moses, the likes of which (prophetically speaking) could not be found in all Israel (Deu. 34:10). Now it was time to accept the greatest responsibility of his life: to enter the promised land. Joshua was ready. He was “full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him” (Deu. 34:9). To Joshua, God said, “as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage” (Jos. 1:5-6).

### The Apostle Paul

Paul was a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, and brought up at the feet of Gamaliel and instructed according to the strict manner of the law of the fathers (Acts 22:3). It has been said, and correctly so, that Paul did indeed pass from a state of being led to that of leading: as did Aristotle (science), Sir Isaac Newton (physics), Martin Luther (religion), Darwin (his theory of evolution).<sup>3</sup> Sir William Ramsey (brilliant scholar, and a master of classical learning) spent thirty years in studying the life and writings of Paul. He stated:

Of all the men of the first century, incomparably the most influential was the Apostle Paul. No one man exercised anything like so much power as he did in molding the future of the Empire. Among the imperial ministers of

the period there appeared none that had any claim to the name of statesman except Seneca, and Seneca fell as far short of Paul in practical influence and intellectual insight as he did in moral character. Had it not been for Paul, if one might guess at what might have been, no man would now remember Greek and Roman civilization.<sup>4</sup>

## QUALITIES NEEDED FOR LEADERSHIP

### Wisdom

This is made abundantly clear in the case of Joshua. He is said to be full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hand on him (Deu. 34:9). Because the people looked to Joshua for direction, they hearkened unto him. Of Christ it is said, “And the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah” (Isa. 11:2). Wisdom is from *phronesis* and refers to understanding, prudence, i.e., a right use of *phren*, the mind.<sup>5</sup> While *sophia* (wisdom) is the insight into the true nature of things, *phronesis* is the ability to discern modes of action with a view to their results.<sup>6</sup> All people need to possess the ability to discern correct modes of action, especially leaders, because in many cases success or failure is at stake. When Jesus sent the twelve to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (a limited commission), He told them to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Mat. 10:16).

### Commitment

Deeply rooted within the breast of every leader must be a deep commitment to God and to His Cause. The responsibility of leading God’s people to the promised land was first given to Moses who led them out of Egypt across the Red Sea and through the wilderness. Unfortunately, all the generation who exited Egypt, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, perished because of unbelief. From the ashes of a fallen people rose another generation bound for Canaan under the command of Joshua. Because of his deep commitment to the tremendous task confronting him, Joshua made sure the people understood what lay ahead. They were instructed to make the proper preparation, for within three days they would pass over the Jordan on their way into the land of their possession (Jos. 1:11). Joshua’s commitment to his task is seen in his plan to search out the land, which he did by sending two men on a mission of reconnaissance. These men were sent to view the land God’s people were about to enter (Jos. 2:1). This

was excellent strategy; it would further insure success in the forthcoming venture. Perhaps the people did not have confidence in their ability to conquer the land, but Joshua certainly did. Commitment is vital to the success of New Testament Christianity, on a collective as well as on a personal level. Paul said, “for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). Commitment to the Cause of Christ is the reason elders faithfully oversee God’s flock (1 Pet. 5:2). Commitment is what motivates gospel preachers to preach the word (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Commitment is what keeps Christians in faithful attendance at worship services and other church-related activities. Commitment is what will motivate Christians to contend for the faith once delivered (Jude 3), as well as keep them faithful until death (cf., Rev. 2:10).

### **The Ability To Confront, Rebuke, And Reprove Sin**

Controversy is inevitable if you “stand” for anything (cf., 1 Cor. 16:13). Truth is by its very nature controversial (cf., Jude 3). Joshua was not afraid of controversy. The children of Israel committed a trespass in the devoted thing (Jos. 7:1). Achan, the son of Carmi, took of the devoted thing which caused the anger of Jehovah to be kindled against the Israelites. Joshua confronted the situation. First, he located the tribe through which the offense came; then he found the family, then the specific individual who actually committed the offense. Achan was taken. He, his sons, and his daughters were stoned to death, and everything else he had was burned with fire (Jos. 7:24-25). Israel could not prosper with sin in the camp, but under the leadership of Joshua Achan’s sin was confronted, rebuked, reprovved and dealt with. Joshua had this ability. Every leader must have it or forfeit the claim of leadership. Paul had this kind of ability also. He continually confronted and refuted those who denied his apostolic credentials. This explains one of the reasons why he began so many of his epistles with “Paul an apostle of Christ” (cf., Rom. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1). He also showed fearlessness in personal confrontation when he resisted (withstood) Peter to the face, because he stood condemned for his inconsistencies regarding the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11). Peter’s error was not one of doctrine but of practice.

### Courage Against Opposition

Opposition is not a new thing. Its antiquity is remarkable. Nehemiah faced it in his day (Neh. 2:19-20). In his work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he was opposed by three antagonists named Sanballat, the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian. When they heard about Nehemiah's task, they laughed him and his fellow workers to scorn, despising and misrepresenting them. Their opposition to Nehemiah's work grew in intensity. Sanballat later referred to them as "feeble Jews" who were trying to fortify themselves, trying to revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish (Neh. 4:2). Tobiah accused them of doing such shoddy work that even a fox could break down their stone wall (Neh. 4:3). Later, when news of the work reached the opposition, Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem sent a message to Nehemiah asking him to come and meet with them on the plain of Ono. The courageous and determined leader of the rebuilding of the walls, said, "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" (Neh. 6:3). Nehemiah successfully faced and overcame his opposition and continued his work because he was a leader.

Every leader can at one time or another expect opposition to his work, especially the overseers of God's flock and gospel preachers (1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 13:45). Elders will be opposed by "unruly and vain talkers and deceivers" (Tit. 1:10). Preachers will be opposed by the likes of men such as Bar-Jesus, a false prophet and teacher who sought to "pervert the right ways of the Lord" (Acts 13:6-10). The opposition always wins when leaders shirk their responsibility. Like a past president said, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

God told Joshua to "be strong and of good courage" (Jos. 1:6). The admonition was repeated in verse 7: "Only be strong and very courageous." Once we have absorbed the book of Joshua, we will be impressed with his remarkable courage, especially under adverse circumstances. Standing squarely in front of him, and opposing his entrance into the ancient city of Jericho, were the monstrous walls protecting the ancient city from intruders; but Joshua defied them and eventually overcame them. One of the tests of good leadership is "perseverance," which Joshua exhibited so well, especially in the capture of Jericho (Jos. 6). For a man to assume the leadership of hundreds

and thousands of people requires an incomparable courage. God knew Joshua had it. Before long, Joshua knew it also. We sometimes do not know what to expect from ourselves until we are put to the test.

### **A Faith That Mentally Accepts And Actively Obeys**

Leadership must have a “mind-set,” one that accepts and obeys. The patriarchs did. Abraham went out when he was called, not knowing where he was going (Heb. 11:8). Noah did according to all that God commanded in the building of the ark (Gen. 6:22). Joshua was obligated to act in the same manner as his predecessors had done: accept what God commands and obey. Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in (Jos. 6:1). Spence says, “Literally rendered it is ‘shutting and closely shut up,’ thus including (1) the act of closing, and (2) the continuance of that act, *sugkeklesmene kai oxuromene* (LXX).”<sup>7</sup> Jericho could not be taken until the walls were demolished, but God in His wisdom had made provisions to remove them. His instructions were:

And ye shall compass the city, all the men of war, going about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And it shall be, that, when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall go up every man straight before him (Jos. 6:3-5).

Was there any obvious reason for Joshua to do the thing commanded? Perhaps there were many reasons why he should not, but there was one reason why he should: God commanded it, and His commandments are given to be obeyed (cf., John 14:15). A faith that mentally accepts and actively obeys is one that does what God commands when there is no obvious reason for doing the thing He commanded save the fact that He said do it. Is it likely that Joshua could see a connection between what he was commanded to do and the end to be gained? Not likely! The Israelites had defeated many other cities, but such endeavors are not mentioned as acts of faith. Not in the history or science of warfare can anything be found comparable to this. The walls of Jericho were going to fall, not because of human works, but by faith. The Bible explicitly affirms the fact that the walls of Jericho fell by faith (Heb. 11:30). Faith acts when there is no obvious relation between the command and the end to be gained. A faith

that mentally accepts and actively obeys is a faith that obeys God where human reason and experience label it foolish. The Israelites could not be blamed for not being able to see why Jericho should be compassed about once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day, other than the fact that these were God's instructions. When they were complied with, the walls fell. A faith that mentally accepts and actively obeys is a faith that attempts to do what God says exactly the way He says to do it, without addition, subtraction, or modification.

The case of Naaman beautifully illustrates this point. Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, honorable, and a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. He was instructed to dip seven times in the Jordan river, and he would be cleansed. At first he rebelled, but he later complied with the instructions given him, and he was cleansed (cf., 2 Kin. 5). This was Joshua's task, and he instructed his people accordingly. Every meticulous detail had to be followed to the letter. Any deviation would result in disobedience and failure. A faith that mentally accepts and actively obeys is a faith that works when sacrifice is involved. Leadership is obligated to accept God's Word without reservation and obey it for the same reason.

### **The Need For Leadership is Perpetual**

The need for leadership never ends. It did not end with Moses. Moses died, but the need for leadership did not. Because it exists continually, someone must be ready to assume the role of leadership. In the case at hand it was Joshua. He was ready. It is not likely that the Israelites would ever have crossed the Jordan without someone to lead them. They probably would have perished, along with their Cause, without ever having seen the land described as the "glory of all the land," the land God had "searched out" for them. The very best Cause in the world will likely perish without someone to take the lead. Recognition of this fact suggests a tremendously important question: "Can anyone possibly think that the children of Israel could have effected the demise of Jericho without leadership?" Even after God had revealed the plan of attack, leadership, as assumed by Joshua, was still necessary. Would the people themselves have had the initiative to continue the march around Jericho without someone to lead the way as well as provide encouragement to continue? Not hardly!

### **Leadership Must Overcome Frustration**

Subsequent to the destruction of Jericho (Jos. 6), Joshua sent spies to “spy out” Ai (Jos. 7). They brought back a favorable report. Because of the report that the men of Ai were few in number, Joshua was advised to send about two or three thousand to fight against them. He did and the battle raged, but Israel was soundly defeated. This situation traumatized Joshua. He rent his clothes and fell to the earth on his face because he did not understand why God had allowed such a defeat. God cleared up his confusion with an unpleasant explanation: there was sin in the camp. God said, “Get thee up; wherefore art thou thus fallen upon thy face?” (Jos. 7:10). Achan, of the tribe of Judah, had committed a grievous sin. He had touched the “devoted thing.” Subsequent to his personal disappointment and discouragement, Joshua overcame his emotions and complied with the instructions God had given him for handling Achan’s sin. Israel then went against Ai in battle and won (Jos. 9). Leadership in the church of the Lord is many times confronted by situations that are extremely frustrating. Elders are “watchers of souls” (Heb. 13:17). They must give account to God for this responsibility, and in instances where members of their flock become unruly, such an accounting is both grievous and frustrating. Great leaders, however, overcome situations of this kind. Leaders are obligated to exercise their oversight with a “ready mind” (1 Pet. 5:2), but this becomes more difficult when the people over which they watch possess a different “mind-set.”

### **Recognition of The Magnitude Of The Cause**

Every leader must be intensely aware of the importance of the Cause he represents and continually convey this importance to the people he leads. Throughout Joshua’s tenure as leader of Israel, he made two things abundantly clear: (1) the importance of their mission, and (2) the absolute necessity of its achievement. He never allowed the people to lose sight of their objective. He continually “put you [them] in remembrance” (cf., 2 Pet. 1:12). Booker T. Washington allegedly approached a wealthy philanthropist and asked for a donation to further his Cause. Following Washington’s presentation, the philanthropist wrote him a check for a large amount of money. Washington expressed his thanks and left. A few seconds later he opened the check and saw the amount. He then returned and said to his donor,

“Sir, I have failed to adequately express to you the importance of my Cause.” The philanthropist then wrote him a check for twice the amount he had originally written.

Joshua knew the magnitude of the Cause he represented. He applied all his energy to its accomplishment. Leaders must be able to grasp the “bigness” of their Cause. Leadership in the church of the Lord must know that the affairs of the kingdom of heaven must be administered with the greatest urgency and efficiency, and at this point we can learn a valuable lesson from the men of this world. Jesus said “the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light” (Luke 16:8). We can think of a number of worldly figures who, with their brilliance and insight, turned corporations which were almost bankrupt into billion-dollar companies. We need this kind of leadership.

### **No Room For Compromise**

There was no room for compromise in Joshua’s attempts to conquer the land of Canaan. He utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai (Jos. 8:26). He took Makkedah and smote it with the edge of the sword and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein; he left none remaining (Jos.10:28). He fought against Libnah, and Jehovah delivered it also. All the souls that were therein were smitten; he left none remaining in it (Jos. 10:30). He encamped against Lachish and fought against it, and Jehovah delivered it into the hands of Israel. All the souls that were therein were smitten with the sword (Jos. 10:31). Joshua, along with Israel, encamped against Eglon and fought against it; they took it and smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein were utterly destroyed (Jos. 10:35). He conquered Hebron in the same way (Jos. 10:36). He fought against Debir and took it, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof. All the souls were destroyed; he left none remaining (Jos. 10:38-39). Joshua fought against the city of Hazor and smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them, and all the cities of those kings did Joshua take, and he smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord commanded (Jos. 11:11-12). The uncompromising exploits of the courageous Joshua are listed in 10:40:

So Joshua smote all the land, the hill-country, and the South, and the lowland, and the slopes, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but he utterly destroyed all that breathed, as Jehovah, the God of Israel, commanded.

Such a feat as accomplished by the son of Nun could not have been successful if any thought whatsoever had been given to compromise, because compromise never works. In Joshua 21:43-45 it is said,

So Jehovah gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And Jehovah gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; Jehovah delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not aught of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

Leadership can perhaps compromise in the area of opinion (if faith and opinion are distinguishable)—but never the essential doctrines of New Testament Christianity. At stake are the establishment, nature, identity, and function of the New Testament church, the plan of salvation, scriptural worship, the work of the Holy Spirit, the mission of the church, and Christian living. Should such things as these be looked upon with indifference, Christianity will disappear, and in its place will come denominationalism. Leaders are obligated to see that the work of God is carried out exactly as He has commanded and authorized it, with no addition, subtraction, or modification.

### **Leaders Must Demand Faithfulness**

Previous to his death, at the age of a hundred and ten, Joshua said,

Now therefore fear Jehovah, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt; and serve ye Jehovah. And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah (Jos. 24:14-15).

Joshua respected Jehovah God and served Him all the days of his life, and his final admonition to Israel was that they must do the same. Leadership is obligated to demand faithfulness on the part of the people they lead. Unfaithfulness can only result in weakness and digression, and much of the responsibility for the apostasy of children of God will have to be accepted by their leaders because of their own weakness and indifference to the Cause they are required to oversee.

### **Leaders Are in Front**

Leaders must be seen. Just as the children of Israel could always see Moses in front of them, so they were always able to see Joshua in front of them. He never “brought up the rear.” When they crossed the Jordan, Joshua was in front of them. When they marched over the fallen walls of Jericho and took command of the defeated city, he was in front of them, leading and encouraging them. When the Israelites victoriously marched throughout Canaan, defeating and conquering all the cities therein, Joshua was in front of them, clearly visible to every eye. Leaders have to be in front of the people, they must be clearly seen and recognized as such. If they cannot be seen, people will grow weak and falter and fall by the wayside. If the followers fall, the leaders must be on hand to “pick them up” so they may continue. People in general, and congregations in particular, can never rise higher than their leaders. No leader can ever afford the luxury of “standing still,” except for analytical purposes. He must continue to move forward, never taking his mind off the objectives he plans to attain. This was the “mind-set” of Joshua. He was fully aware of his intentions and the accomplishment of them. He was never confused over the exact nature of his mission. He was never in doubt of success.

### **Leaders Must Have Vision**

Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint.” Vision involves law and revelation, without which people will go astray. Leaders must be able to make future plans, and provide guidance in the attainment of those plans. Progress is often thwarted simply because leaders cannot “look ahead” or because they do not recognize future trends. Men who cannot “look ahead” are not leaders. Many years ago in a California church the brethren were meeting in a small building located in a residential area. There was no off-street parking available and no real room for growth in that area of the city. About that time, however, some property on the west end of town became available. Since the town was growing in that direction it seemed necessary to purchase a lot and build adequate facilities which would accommodate future needs, but the brethren did not have the incentive or the vision to take action. Today, the church still meets where it did years ago, is still small, and it still lacks the same essen-

tials. And the property that was then available no longer is, and if it were the price would be quadrupled.

Leaders must have vision. Another California church located on property adjacent to a freeway, was “hedged in” by a run-down, less-than-successful business located next to them. The brethren could have purchased the property, a corner lot, demolished the dilapidated building, and cleared off the debris which would have given them excellent, unrestricted exposure to freeway traffic. The property would have enhanced the value of their already-owned property. But the brethren could not see fit to act. Today, their building is still stuck in the same location, beside the same old building that still blocks a great portion of exposure to the freeway. The state has now put up a high brick wall that completely obscures the building. The only thing that can be seen is a small portion of the sign that looms just a bit higher than the fence.

Why do brethren fail to act in such situations? Why do they refuse to at least explore such opportunities? There are a number of obvious reasons. There is no incentive to grow, there is no leadership, there is no vision, and the greatest tragedy of all is the fact that the brethren of whom I’m speaking reduce everything to dollars and cents. To them a dollar looks as big as a bedsheet! Leaders must have vision. Without it the Cause of Christ cannot prosper as the Lord wishes. Without vision on the part of leadership the Lord’s church cannot solve the problems that face it, it cannot meet the challenges the future hurls before it, it cannot take advantage of the opportunities that God places before it, it cannot fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord as waters that cover the sea (cf., Isa. 11:9).

Joshua had vision. He could see the inhabitants of the land of Canaan driven out. He could see the people of God claiming the land that had been promised them (cf., Gen. 12:1-3). He could see them enjoying the fruits of someone else’s labors (cf., Deu. 8:7-10). He knew Israel, under his leadership and God’s directions, would wage a successful campaign against Jericho (Jos. 6:2), Ai (Jos. 8:26), and all the other cities of the land (Jos. 10:40). He knew his people could fight against and defeat all the powerful kings that stood in their way (Jos. 10:23-27). How did he know all this? He was a leader! He was a leader with vision. He was a leader that could lay rightful claim to

every point made in this presentation. Joshua, son of Nun, was a great example of leadership.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Henry H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1965), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup>Wilbur M. Smith, *Therefore Stand* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1945), p. 246.

<sup>4</sup>Sir William Ramsey, "Pauline and Other Studies," Quoted in Wilbur Smith, *Therefore Stand* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1945), p. 246.

<sup>5</sup>W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1966), p. 221.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Hackworth, "Answering False Doctrines Relating to Galatians, No. II" *Studies in Galatians*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1986), p. 349.

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# DAVID—GREAT EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP

*Steve Ellis*



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## INTRODUCTION

The theme for this year's lectures, *Leadership*, is a tremendously important topic and one which truly deserves to be carefully studied in this fashion. Since it is obviously true that qualified leaders are essential to any organization's ability to achieve its goals, those who love the Lord and His spiritual body are eager to do whatever they can to improve the quantity and the quality of the human leaders of the church of Christ. A series of lectures based upon various portions of Scripture pertaining to the subject of *Leadership* is a good way to help to accomplish this purpose.

The specific subject which we shall examine in this lecture is: "David—Great Leader of Men." David is surely one of the most fascinating people about whom we read in the Bible. He was truly a multi-talented individual. At various times in his life, David very capably served as a shepherd, a musician, a soldier, an inspired poet, and a king. He was a very complex person who could be, depending upon the circumstances, either tender and forgiving or fierce and deadly. Although he committed some terrible sins, overall David made the will of Jehovah the law of his life, and he was lovingly described by

God as “a man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). He was certainly a great leader of men, and an examination of some of the qualities and behaviors that contributed to his being such can greatly assist us in becoming more effective in our own efforts to serve God and our fellow man. Let us notice some of the major traits that so well equipped David to serve as a great example of leadership.

### DAVID PREPARED HIMSELF FOR LEADERSHIP

Early in his reign as the first King of Israel, Saul failed an important test of faith at Gilgal by not waiting for Samuel to offer sacrifices and to provide instructions relative to the Israelites’ military campaign against the Philistines. Samuel expressed God’s disapproval of Saul’s disobedience in the following words:

And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee (1 Sam. 13:13-14).

That “man after God’s own heart,” of whom Samuel spoke, was the youthful shepherd, David.

While Saul was committing various offences which resulted in God’s deciding to remove him from the throne, the youngest son of Jesse the Bethlehemite was preparing himself for leadership. David’s son, Solomon, was inspired to write, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,” and the shepherd boy who became king is a wonderful example of the wisdom of obeying this command (Ecc. 12:1).

Although he could not have known precisely what opportunities for service and leadership God would afford him, it is readily apparent that David had carefully prepared himself in various ways. During the long hours of his tending the sheep, David evidently had constantly practiced slinging stones until he acquired marvelous accuracy with this simple but lethal weapon. He had also devoted much time to playing his harp and cultivating his enormous talent for music. Far more importantly, he must have spent countless hours in prayer to God and in meditation upon His Word, and he must have been a “doer of God’s Word” in his everyday life (cf., Jam. 1:22).

The fact that David had kept himself pure in heart and life is clearly indicated by the way in which God responded to Samuel's surmise that David's older brother, Eliab, might be the one chosen to be Saul's successor. The beginning of Samuel's evaluation of the sons of Jesse is described as follows:

And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed *is* before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart (1 Sam. 16:6-7).

This divine declaration does not mean that David was physically ugly. In fact, he is described in the Scriptures as "goodly to look to," "a comely person," and "of a fair countenance" (1 Sam. 16:12, 18; 17:42). However, it was the condition of his "inner man" that made David so capable and so attractive in the sight of God.

Both young and old alike would do well to learn from David to subscribe to God's standard of values. Those who are truly qualified to lead God's people are those who have prepared themselves by making the condition of their "inner man" their top priority. Of course, David's exemplary behavior as a young man should be of special interest to young people since biblical characters such as David, Joseph, and Daniel remind us that young people can be great spiritual examples if they determine always to keep themselves pure and to stay close to God. God is certainly aware of young people who aspire to be His instruments, and He will provide great opportunities for service to those who have properly prepared themselves. In Psalm 78:70-72 we are informed of God's constant awareness of young David:

He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.

Both the integrity and the skilfulness with which David led his people were direct results of his careful preparation early in life. In light of his experience, those who aspire to lead God's people today should recognize the vast importance of preparing themselves for such important service in the kingdom. Moreover, every Christian should do his utmost to assist young people in their preparation for leadership.

## DAVID POSSESSED GREAT FAITH IN GOD

David demonstrated his tremendous confidence in God on numerous occasions, but none is more memorable than his conquest of the Philistine giant, Goliath. In chapter seventeen of First Samuel we have the inspired record of this magnificent demonstration of David's faith in God. The record states that, while the Israelite and Philistine armies were arrayed against one another in the foothills of Judah in a sort of stalemate situation, a nine feet and nine inches tall Philistine giant named Goliath challenged the Israelites to send their champion to fight him. In fact, Goliath challenged the Israelites twice daily for some forty days, suggesting that the army whose champion won the duel should be declared the victorious army, making a full-fledged battle, involving thousands of soldiers in mortal combat, unnecessary. The reaction of the Israelites to the swaggering giant with a seemingly impregnable panoply is described as follows: "When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid" (1 Sam. 17:11).

At this critical juncture God provided His people with a champion, whose mightiest weapon was his unwavering faith in Jehovah! David was sent by his father, Jesse, to carry food to his three older brothers who were soldiers in Saul's army. While visiting with his brothers, he heard the repeated taunts of Goliath and clearly indicated by his questions that he was not afraid like the others:

And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? (1 Sam. 17:26).

Because of his great love for Jehovah and his countrymen, as well as his great faith in God, David was not willing simply to stand by and to wring his hands while God and His people were blasphemed and humiliated!

Moreover, as he determined to answer the challenge of Goliath, David's faith was so strong that he refused to be discouraged. For instance, he refused to be discouraged by his oldest brother, Eliab:

And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down

that thou mightest see the battle. And David said, What have I now done? *Is there* not a cause? (1 Sam. 17:28-29).

David also refused to be discouraged by King Saul and, in his response to Saul's pessimism, he revealed that his confidence was not self-confidence, but confidence in God:

And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou *art but* a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered *it* out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught *him* by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee (1 Sam. 17:32-37).

Since David had such great confidence that the Lord would be with him that he was unwilling to be discouraged by either Eliab or Saul, he certainly did not permit himself to be discouraged by his boastful opponent, Goliath. It thrills our hearts to read the following verses:

And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling *was* in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield *went* before him. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was *but* a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, *Am* I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle *is* the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands (1 Sam. 17:40-47).

David's supreme confidence in God was richly rewarded. As he ran to meet his monstrous adversary, the record states:

And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang *it*, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but *there was* no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron (1 Sam. 17:49-52).

The great faith of the shepherd boy from Bethlehem served as the pipeline for God's power to provide an heroic personal victory for David and a glorious national victory for Israel.

Later in life, David was inspired to write, "the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psa. 27:1). Every child of God, and especially those who are in positions of leadership, needs to have this same faithful attitude as we face the "giants" that still threaten the spiritual security of God's people today. The church as a whole must confidently rely upon God and His truth to enable us to conquer such "giants" as atheism, humanism, liberalism, and worldliness. Individual Christians must rely upon God in order to conquer such personal opponents as physical and mental illness, emotional pain and loneliness.

Those who lead us can be truly effective only if their faith in God is sufficient to enable them to see that our success in accomplishing the Lord's will today does not depend solely on our own human strength or capabilities. In referring to the likely outcome of some athletic contest, we often say that one team is much better than another "on paper." However, we all know that games are not played "on paper"; they are played on the field! "On paper" David did not stand a chance against Goliath. Nevertheless, the confident shepherd boy conquered the boastful giant because he truly believed that God could and would use him to win the victory. No doubt David believed in his own ability to sling stones with great accuracy, but the primary source of his confidence was his heartfelt conviction that he was doing the will of an omnipotent God, Who would bless his efforts and crown them with success. May God help our leaders to learn from David that our success in any good work depends more upon God's blessing than upon

our own human capability. Great leaders are not intimidated by the way things look “on paper” when they are totally convinced they are acting “in the name of the LORD of hosts” and they truly believe “the battle is the LORD’S ” (1 Sam. 17:45, 47).

A third trait that made David such a great leader of men was that he greatly appreciated, and usually manifested, godly behavior.

### **DAVID PURSUED A GODLY WAY OF LIFE**

The apostle Paul was inspired to write the following exhortations:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour (Eph. 4:32-5:2).

*Followers* in Ephesians 5:1 could be accurately translated “imitators.” It always has been God’s desire that His children seek to behave as He behaves. Since it is true that “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,” those who truly love and admire God are inclined to imitate Him. A major reason why David was such a great leader of men is that, for the most part, he so loved and so admired God that he sought to behave like God.

David’s pursuit of a godly way of life is clearly seen in the fact that he had such a forgiving heart. David’s inclination to forgive his fellow man was repeatedly demonstrated in his behavior toward Saul. We remember that as a result of David’s stunning victory over the champion of Gath and his sudden popularity, Saul became insanely jealous of the young hero (1 Sam. 18:6-9). Saul’s jealousy gradually developed into hatred, and he tried three times to kill David: once by inciting him to daring combat with the Philistines, and twice with a javelin from his own hand (1 Sam. 18:11, 25-27; 19:9-10). Moreover, after David had fled from Saul’s murderous wrath, Saul used his armed forces to hunt David like an animal. During his flight, on two occasions, at the Cave of Engedi and the Hill of Hachilah, David had the opportunity to kill Saul (1 Sam. 24:1-7; 26:1-9). Yet, because of his great respect for God and his own forgiving heart, David refused to “stretch forth his hand against the LORD’S anointed” (1 Sam. 26:9).

David’s eagerness to forgive also may be seen in his behavior subsequent to the deaths of Saul and his sons: Jonathan, Abinadab, and Melchishua, at Mt. Gilboa. In his beautiful “Song of the Bow,” David

grieved over the death of Saul as much as he did over the death of his dearest friend, Jonathan, and highly praised the King who had sought his life (2 Sam. 1:17-27). Moreover, once he had consolidated his power over all Israel, David did not seek to find and to exterminate every surviving member of Saul's family which was the usual way in which ancient rulers treated their potential rivals. In fact, after he had led his people to victory over their various enemies, David behaved like God by seeking a soul to bless:

And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake? And *there was* of the house of Saul a servant whose name *was* Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, *Art* thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. And the king said, *Is* there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, *which is* lame on *his* feet (2 Sam. 9:1-3).

Of course that surviving son of Jonathan was Mephibosheth, and David's gracious behavior toward him is some of the most generous and godly and heartwarming human behavior described in the Bible. David's willingness to restore to Mephibosheth all of the property formerly belonging to Saul and his decision to treat him as one of his own sons helps us better to appreciate the immeasurable mercy, grace, and generosity that our loving God is so eager to bestow upon all of us (1 John 3:1-2).

In His matchless "Sermon on the Mount," our Savior emphasized that being forgiving is essential to effectual praying and citizenship in the kingdom of heaven by declaring: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mat. 6:14-15). All who would be true Christians and who would enjoy God's forgiveness must be willing to forgive their fellow man. Those who serve as leaders in the church most certainly should provide good examples to their brethren in this vital area of righteous living. People who hold grudges and who are harsh and unforgiving in their attitude toward their fellow man are not qualified to serve as leaders of the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). All of us should learn from David, who learned from God the beauty, desirability, and tremendous spiritual importance of having a forgiving heart.

The fact that David pursued a godly way of life was also demonstrated by his constant willingness to confess and repent of his sins.

Although he was guilty of some terrible transgressions, even as an absolute monarch David always retained a penitent heart. Unforgettable evidence of this trait is seen in the way David responded to being confronted with his sins of adultery and murder by the courageous prophet, Nathan. A description of this remarkable encounter is found in the twelfth chapter of Second Samuel. After being made to face the enormous evil of his deeds and after being informed of the terrible consequences of his sins: “David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die” (2 Sam. 12:13). Praising the Lord for His amazing grace, David wrote in Psalm 32:5: “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” Although he had to suffer some severe earthly consequences of his misdeeds, because of his penitent heart and the limitless mercy of God, David escaped the eternal consequences of his sins.

In order for God’s children to continue to be the blessed recipients of our Heavenly Father’s forgiveness today, we too must determine ever to retain penitent hearts. We must never forget the inspired reassurance of John the apostle that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Those who would be truly qualified and effective leaders in the church must never cease to be cognizant of their own human frailty as they seek to lead others in following the Christ. All of us should learn from David that no amount of authority or responsibility elevates anyone above the law of God. Furthermore, we should learn from David’s response to Nathan’s rebuke that the presentation of truth should never be viewed as an act of hostility, even when it exposes sin in our own lives (Gal. 4:16). Rather, we should always seek to retain penitent hearts ourselves that we might behave in such a fashion that our own sins might continue to be washed away by the precious blood of Jesus.

The last example of David’s pursuit of a godly way of life that we shall notice here is that he was sacrificially devoted to building the house of God. We are informed in First Chronicles that, although David strongly desired to build a temple, “an house unto the name of the LORD my God: But the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Thou hast shed blood abundantly” (1 Chr. 22:7-8). Nevertheless, David was commended by God for having desired to perform this task and was permitted by God to make most of the preparations for the construction of the temple which was eventually built during the reign of Solomon (1 Kin. 8:18; 1 Chr. 22:14-19). Not the least of those preparations for building the temple was David’s personal donation of some \$613,000,000 worth of gold and silver from his own private wealth (1 Chr. 29:3-4).

Of course, the church of Christ is God’s “temple” today, and every child of God should be sacrificially devoted to building up this “spiritual house” comprised of “living stones” (Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5). In light of the glorious eternal future which Jesus has made available to all faithful members of His church, Paul urged Christians to “comfort yourselves together, and edify one another” (1 The. 5:11).

Every child of God, and especially church leaders, should determine to imitate David’s sacrificial devotion as we seek to build up the body of Christ. We should be willing sacrificially to devote our time, our abilities, and our money to building up one another and to endeavoring “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). We should also be willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to overcome our human inclinations to be proud, self-centered, impatient, and hypersensitive in our association with one another (Eph. 4:1-3; Phi. 2:1-4). In so doing, we will be following in the footsteps of that amazing shepherd boy who became a mighty King of ancient Israel and a magnificent leader of men. Even more importantly, we will be following in the footsteps of our “Great Shepherd” and “King of kings” Who made the ultimate sacrifice to make it possible for us to be members of His church and to live with Him forever in heaven (Heb. 13:20; Rev. 17:14; Phi. 2:5-11).

## CONCLUSION

We ought constantly to thank God for the many fine examples of leadership which are readily available to everyone who is willing to study the Bible. Most Bible students would agree that David is one of the greatest of the leaders about whom we read in God’s Word. May God help us all to follow David’s example in preparing for leadership, in possessing great faith in God, and in pursuing a godly life. Such behavior helped to enable David to unite his nation and to free his country from their enemies, as well as to qualify him to be a type of

the Messiah Himself. Such behavior by every Christian, and especially our leaders, would greatly increase our ability to serve the Lord today.

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# NEHEMIAH—GREAT EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP

*Clifford Newell, Jr.*



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Clifford's preaching has involved radio and television programs, lectureships, and mission trips to Scotland. He is married to the former Diane Elaine King and they have two children: Joy Wooten and Clifford III. Clifford has been preaching for 23 years and is currently working with the East Bristol Church of

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## INTRODUCTION

LeRoy Eims wrote,

A crisis of leadership engulfs the world. Political leaders, economic experts, editorial writers, newsmen, spokesmen in the fields of education and religion raise the hue and cry: men who know the way and can lead others on the right path are few.<sup>1</sup>

This writer could not agree more with Eims' conclusions. There is a pressing need for this series of lectures, providing an in-depth study of church leadership. To illustrate the need for such, observe the following: I received a call from a brother in the summer of 1995, stating that a church of Christ had ordained "instant elders."<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, an eldership raised its objection to a Christian lady who had done wrong, refused to repent, and was withdrawn from; but later she came forward repenting of her sins, in which they responded by saying, "The timing is wrong." In another state, a brother became a leader because he felt he was pushed into becoming an elder and stated that he did not desire the work. When churches choose to take the path of least resistance, it is certain that leadership will be declining. Modern management concepts are valuable; there can be no

doubt about it; but we must never ignore or miss the tremendous spiritual leadership and management principles of the Bible.

The progress of the church depends upon its leadership, of which Nehemiah is an excellent example. The days were dark and the difficulties many when Nehemiah set about to complete the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. The work had been neglected for a long time, which meant the problems would be multiplied. A job delayed as long as the rebuilding of the walls would not be easy to start and continue. This indicates the kind of leadership qualities Nehemiah had. For one to be confronted with the problems he faced and to accomplish what he did required essential qualities for effective leadership.

### BACKGROUND

In order for one to appreciate Nehemiah and leadership, it will be important for a background study in order to provide a foundation upon which the many great principles may rest. He introduces himself to us as “the son of Hachaliah” (Neh. 1:1), and was probably from the tribe of Judah (Neh. 1:2; 2:3; 7:2); he may have been a descendant of King David (Neh. 1:3; 1 Chr. 3:19). He comes upon the scene as a cupbearer in Shushan (Susa), the principal palace and winter residence of King Artaxerxes. As a cupbearer, he is in a rather unique position. He holds the offices of prime minister and master of ceremonies rolled up into one. A cupbearer who had his monarch’s interest at heart, and who stayed abreast of the times, could frequently exert great influence upon his sovereign.

The record of Nehemiah begins with information that is true but disheartening. All attempts to rebuild the wall have been frustrated (Ezra 4:4-24). He knows that “a city without locked gates and lofty walls is no city at all.” It is defenseless and can afford no protection to those within.

The book of Nehemiah occupies an important place on the stage of history. The Hebrew people had once been a powerful force in the Near East. But the kingdom which was established during the “United Kingdom Era” under the direction of Saul, David, and Solomon, split in two. The ten northern tribes banded together into one kingdom known as Israel and the two southern tribes joined forces to form one kingdom known as Judah. From this time onward, their fortunes were mixed. Idolatry prevailed. Ultimately in 722 B.C. God allowed the Assyrians to capture and carry away Israel into captivity. When the

Assyrians deported Israel, she scattered them, which is a policy still enforced with prisoners. There were actually three carryings away into Assyrian captivity.<sup>3</sup> Only Judah survived. The southern tribes, however, failed to learn from Israel's experience. As a result, they too were taken into captivity and deported—this time by the Babylonians. There were three carryings away this time, also.<sup>4</sup>

Jeremiah spoke of captivity being seventy years (Jer. 25:11-12). During the seventy years the Jews spent in captivity, the power of Babylon was broken by the combined forces of the Medes and Persians. Under the new administration, King Cyrus, God's anointed (Isa. 44:28; 45:1) gave permission for the Hebrew people to return to Palestine and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1-3). The first exiles returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel. The foundation of the Temple was laid, but the work was opposed by the Samaritans, and it was interrupted for more than fifteen years.

Later on, another group of Hebrews returned to Palestine, led by Ezra. On Ezra's arrival in the land, he found the people to be in a deplorable condition—spiritually and morally. He therefore began to minister to them by teaching (Ezra 7:10). His teaching of the Law would bear fruit some fourteen years later (Neh. 8-10).

Finally, during the reign of Artaxerxes I, Nehemiah<sup>5</sup> returned to Judah with a remnant of Hebrews. He found no wall to protect them; the people were constantly being harassed. Morale was low. The rich exploited the poor, and the same sins which had led to the captivity were being practiced once again. The way in which Nehemiah united the people and inspired them to accomplish a seemingly impossible task is most instructive. The strategy he used was successful then and has been proven successful when employed by church leaders today.

### **THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH—PROFILE OF A LEADER**

The book of Nehemiah is an excellent treatise on leadership. Within its pages are set forth the essential effective qualities that men need. Churches that are on the verge of spiritual bankruptcy could be made thriving congregations with good leadership. Emphasis has been given on the qualifications of elders, as set forth in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. However, one needs to realize that a man may be married, have children, be a good and faithful man, and yet lack qualities that are essential to good and effective leadership. Let us survey the book of Nehemiah and observe how he was able to accomplish so much.

### Concern

An essential quality for effective leadership is concern. “That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and *certain* men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem” (Neh. 1:2). In chapter one we meet Nehemiah who has learned from Hanani the sad condition in Jerusalem: the remnant are in great affliction and reproach, the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned. When Nehemiah heard these disturbing words, he sat down and wept (lit. a flood of tears or loud weeping). After certain days he fasted and prayed before the God of heaven, knowing that from a heart that has concern must be a heart willing to give time and thought to the work. While other Jews were busy with their own affairs, Nehemiah spent three days looking over Jerusalem (Neh. 2:11). The others were sleeping, while Nehemiah was working (Neh. 2:12). Most elders have to work to make a living; therefore, if they do a good job, they will have to give time and thought above and beyond that of others in the church. Hence, a man that is not willing to sacrifice his time should not accept the responsibility of being a leader in any capacity! Hence, a leader must have a real concern for others.

### Prayer

Another essential quality for effective leadership is communion with God.

And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, *If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.* O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this

day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cup-bearer (Neh. 1:5-11).

Good people, Nehemiah was a man of prayer, and so must leaders be today. When he heard of the condition of Jerusalem he fasted and prayed: "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven" (Neh. 1:4). He prayed before he spoke: "Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king" (Neh. 2:4-5). Nehemiah was a praying man; he prayed when others scorned:

But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked *thee* to anger before the builders (Neh. 4:1-5).

Nehemiah prayed when the opposition tried to stop the work: "And conspired all of them together to come *and* to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them" (Neh. 4:8-9). Nehemiah even prayed when Sanballat tried to get him to compromise: "For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands" (Neh. 6:9).

J. Edgar Hoover said, "The force of prayer is greater than any possible combination of man-controlled powers, because prayer is man's greatest means of tapping the infinite resources of God."

For prayer to be effective, it must be preceded by knowledge of a need. Nehemiah knew the condition of his people and this motivated him to pray. It is observed that for prayer to be effective it should also be conducted in an attitude of reverence. Nehemiah's attitude is one of reverence and submission. He knows that the self-sufficient do not pray, they merely talk to themselves. The self-satisfied will not pray; they have no knowledge of their need. The self-righteous cannot pray; they have no basis on which to approach God. Nehemiah continues

entreating the Lord's favor for four months (Neh. 1:1; 2:1). During this time he comes to see the issues more clearly than ever before. He also begins to understand the part he is to play in the answer to his own prayer. When Nehemiah received the delegation from Jerusalem, he showed an immediate interest in the welfare of the people and their city. When he learned of their plight, he became personally involved. He fasted and prayed for them.

### Character

In the next place, an essential quality for effective leadership is character. An effective leader must be a man of **integrity**. He must possess uprightness of character and soundness of moral principles. He must know and stand for what is right—even in the face of popular disfavor. Nehemiah “was the king’s cupbearer” (Neh. 1:11). This was a responsible position. The king knew his life was in his hands. If someone had been able to bribe Nehemiah, or in some way use him to put poison in the cup, it would mean death. Hence, Nehemiah had demonstrated his integrity and character, which is the beginning of all effective leadership. One without character and integrity will never be able to lead others. In working toward his goal, Nehemiah faced obstacles that would have caused a man of lesser ability to give up. The most disheartening attacks were directed against his person, but he withstood them because of what (not who) he was. His character may be traceable directly to his willingness to live under the authority of the Scriptures. We lose our character and our ability to discern the issues which confront us when we neglect the study of God’s Word. We find it easier to sacrifice our high ideals of righteousness and integrity on the altars of expediency and selfishness. Real character is a positive thing. It is not the protection of innocence, but the practice of virtue which forms the basis of effective leadership.

### Ability To Change Hearts

A fourth essential quality for effective leadership is the ability to change hearts. “And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?” (Neh. 2:3). A leader who closely identifies with those whom he leads will be able to motivate them to greater accomplishment. He will be able to estimate their individual capacities, weld

them into a unit, and challenge them with personal goals. As Bernard L. Montgomery pointed out, “The beginning of leadership is a battle for the hearts and minds of men.”<sup>6</sup> If Nehemiah was to be successful, he had to appeal to the heart of the king. He had to be able to influence him. He was also successful in changing the hearts of his people, for the Scriptures speak, “So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work” (Neh. 4:6). Truly, it is the work of leaders to change the hearts of men through the gospel of Christ, leading them in submission to the will of God and to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord” (2 Pet. 3:18).

### Effective Communication

In the next place, an essential quality for effective leadership is communication.

Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this* good work (Neh. 2:17-18).

Franklin Camp speaking in regards to the importance of communication said, “It is here that elders experience their greatest failure.”<sup>7</sup> Nehemiah, however, is an excellent example of the importance and the effectiveness of communication. Nehemiah asked the rulers to look at the situation. When they did so, he knew they would see the need. He had that much faith in them. He told them: “Ye see the distress” (Neh. 2:17). With this picture in mind, Nehemiah identified himself with them. He did not say, “I have observed the situation and somebody needs to do something about this. You all have been here for quite some time; why haven’t you done something?” Instead, Nehemiah included himself among those upon whom the reproach fell. After Nehemiah communicated with the people, they said, “Let us rise up and build” (Neh. 2:18). Their response clearly shows the clarity of Nehemiah’s communication. It is a tragic mistake when elders fail to communicate pertinent information to the church!

### Collision With The Enemy

Another essential quality for effective leadership is collision with the enemies.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard *it*, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What *is* this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem (Neh. 2:19-20).

The collision with the enemies took a twofold direction. First, there was the opposition from without. This was seen in the form of scorn (Neh. 4:1-6), force (Neh. 6:7-23), and craftiness (Neh. 6:1-19). The other direction was from within. The hindrances from within were debris (Neh. 4:10), fear (Neh. 4:11-14), and greed (Neh. 5:1-13). Nehemiah told those from without, “Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem” (Neh. 2:20). He told them clearly and emphatically that they had no business being involved. Nehemiah realized that to allow them to participate in the work of rebuilding the walls would bring mixed worship into Jerusalem. God was not the only one these people worshiped; they worshiped idols as well (2 Kin. 17:33). Nehemiah knew that such service was not acceptable to God. God does not allow someone to compete for the hearts of men. If these people with their mixed worship and service to idolatrous gods came to Jerusalem, it would only be a matter of time until those in Jerusalem would also be influenced and would join with them in idolatrous worship. Elders, take heed, one cannot compromise with the denominational world without soon accepting denominational principles and being brought down to their level.

### Cooperation

A seventh essential quality for effective leadership is cooperation. “And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord” (Neh. 3:5). It is still true that in various works there will be some who do not want to cooperate. This circumstance did not hinder Nehemiah; he did not allow a minority to stop the work. He was not inconsiderate of the minority; he just knew that they were wrong, and there was no reason for their not helping in the work. Elders need to be able to evaluate situations and not allow a minority to defeat a given work or to keep the church from engaging in a work which needs to be done. When an eldership allows a minority to dominate them, they are no longer overseers of the church; the

minority become the overseers. Nehemiah arranged the work so that various ones could feel they were working where they were needed. This action created a feeling of belonging; they did not think of themselves as outsiders. The entirety of Nehemiah 3 is a record of a coordinated work of brethren working together. It should be the aim and the ideal of every eldership to produce such unity in the congregations which they oversee.

### Handling Criticism

Another essential quality for effective leadership is the ability to handle criticism.

And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and *there is* much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease (Neh. 4:10-11).

Nehemiah's enemies set about to try to discourage the work through criticism. Not all criticism is wrong, some of it is constructive and valuable. Elders must of necessity learn to handle it without becoming unglued. No man (or group) can lead the people of God, plan for the growth and the welfare of the church, and carry the gospel to a lost world without receiving criticism. Therefore, it is most important for elders to learn how to handle it and to be able to distinguish between constructive and destructive criticism. Note how Nehemiah responded to it: first he prayed (Neh. 2:4); second, he did not retaliate; third, he did not quit; and fourth, he would not allow them to discourage him. Nehemiah's advice was, and is: "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them" (Neh. 4:9). He kept before them the importance of the conflict, which is a unique way to handle complaints. Leadership which can inspire confidence and hope in the midst of discouragement is, indeed, one which is worthy of overseeing God's people and one which will be successful in accomplishing whatever tasks and opportunities may be placed before them.

### Critical Analysis

A ninth essential quality for effective leadership is critical analysis. "That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in *some one of* the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief" (Neh. 6:2). Nehemiah saw through their

tactics. He had already had some dealings with these people, and knew they were not interested in the work which he was doing or the cause for which he was working. His previous dealing with them gave him some understanding of their character and of their motives. He knew them by their fruit (Mat. 7:15-20). He saw clearly their purpose and knew it was evil. Elders would do well to look at things beyond the surface, which will enable them to see evil that different ones intend to do or challenge the church to participate in. Many false movements have been first welcomed because of a failure to critically analyze before approval was given.

### Confidence Of Followers

Last, an essential quality for effective leadership is to win the confidence of the people you are leading.

Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that is*, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. But the former governors that *had been* before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God (Neh. 5:14-15).

Any leader who is successful must have the confidence of the people who follow. Confidence rests upon character, and Nehemiah's kept him from following the practice of those who had preceded him. It must be kept clearly before us, as we observe the qualifications in First Timothy 3, that qualifications produce character, out of character comes confidence, and from confidence comes followers. One of the saddest pictures in the church of our Lord, is one in which the elders have lost the confidence of the people to lead them, but they continue in their office! There are privileges which go with an eldership, but there are also tremendous responsibilities. The privileges must not be made primary if they lead to the ignoring of the work. Nehemiah was also sensitive to the needs of the people around him. One who takes advantage of those who are under one's oversight and who is not concerned about their problems and their needs will never be a successful leader. One cannot build confidence in this way. The eldership which lives in the fear of God will have the respect and the confidence of those who follow it.

## CONCLUSION

As it pertains to leadership, “When all is said and done, more will be said than done!” Dynamic, successful leadership in the church does not just happen. It takes planning, prayer, study, selection, and work. The Lord’s church will never be through with its leadership training. According to an old saying: “If you do not know where you are going, any road will do.” It is time we realize and start acting as though leadership is ordained of God. Our study of Nehemiah and leadership principles are applicable in our day, even though these principles were taken from the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4). It must be obvious that God still desires these same qualities today in the lives of the men who lead the saints of God. A leader, whose dedication to the task at hand is balanced by his concern for others, will be able to view the whole project—the work and the workers—with proper discernment. May Nehemiah be an example to leaders, who probe the springs of his life, emulate his integrity, learn from his convictions, develop the same sense of loyalty, understand the dynamics of leadership, and exercise the same tactfulness. Thank God for faithful leaders!

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>LeRoy Eims, *Be The Leader You Were Meant To Be* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1975), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>*Instant Elders* is the term used by a congregation when making an announcement one Sunday morning without prior notice that these names (which the announcer read) are now considered elders. A prayer was given and the services were ended.

<sup>3</sup>These captivities occurred during the early reign of Pekah (2 Kin. 15:29), at the close of the reign of Pekah (2 Kin. 15:37), and during the reign of Hoshea (2 Kin. 17:4-6).

<sup>4</sup>These captivities occurred during the third year of Jehoiakim (2 Chr. 36:5-8), in the first year of Jehoiachin (2 Chr. 36:10), and in the eleventh year of Zedekiah (2 Kin. 24:14-20).

<sup>5</sup>There were three returns from captivity: Zerubbabel—Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8; 2:2,64); Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10,25-26; 8:1-21); and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:1-6).

<sup>6</sup>Bernard L. Montgomery, *The Path to Leadership* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>Franklin Camp, *Principles and Perils of Leadership* (Birmingham: Roberts & Sons, Inc., n.d.), p. 231.

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# HISTORY OF DEPARTURE IN LEADERSHIP

*Bobby Liddell*



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## INTRODUCTION

God ordained that the church of our Lord have its organization according to His pattern, and to His pattern only. That should not be a surprise since He has always demanded that His pattern be followed when such was given (Heb. 8:5). How then shall we know God's will in the area of church government? The same way we know God's will in any other area—by a careful examination of His revealed Word. “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

## GOD'S PATTERN FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

God commanded that there be a plurality of qualified men, duly selected and appointed who would oversee the work of each local congregation (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5ff; Heb. 13:17). Never, according to God's plan, was any church overseen by **an** elder or **the** elder (or, for that matter, a **she** elder). Nor, was there ever an organization of churches into a district, diocese, convention,

or synod, according to the divine directive. Each local congregation was independent of others and self-ruled under the authority of God.

Therefore, the authority came not from some man or group of men over several churches, but each local church followed the Word of God. While such an arrangement made them neither isolationists nor anti-cooperationists, it did work to avoid the danger of one church's fall causing several others to fall with it. As the old illustration goes: if a window has only one pane, breaking it destroys the whole window; however, if a window has many individual panes, to break one does not affect the others which remain intact and unbroken.

Many have set forth that men have the responsibility, or the right, or the privilege of determining how the church should be organized. The plain truth is that men have never been entrusted so. Nor can man ever improve upon God's plan for the government of the kingdom, though many have tried. The way to salvation, acceptable worship, and church government is not in man (Jer. 10:23).

Still, men contend that church government is a matter of indifference, or of opinion. Some, in attempting to formulate an organizational system, still argue congregational autonomy must be maintained, while others propose a denominational concept of conferences and conventions to pass laws, and to foster man-made mandates upon members. Others hold to the papal system of a universal leader, with the hierarchal pyramid under him. In addition, those leaning toward pragmatism are willing to accept whatever "works." While one tending toward anti-ism is ready to bind laws where God has not bound, the liberal is ready to loose where God has not loosed (Mat. 16:19; 18:18). At the same time, the worldly want something more than the simple plan offered by God, for it is not elaborate and impressive enough for them.

In order to consider departures in the leadership of the church, we must, necessarily, consider the leaders. Generally, we in churches of Christ speak of elders who oversee the work. This is but one of six words used to name and describe those whom God has, in His pattern, set over the local congregation. Notice the various uses as recorded in Acts 20. Paul sent for the elders of the church of Ephesus (v. 17). He calls these same men overseers (v. 28). In the same verse, he instructs them to shepherd (feed) the church. It is absolutely essential that we understand that these are three words describing the same people.

However, we mentioned six words that describe those in the leadership role of the local church. The fact is that each of these three words has a companion word. Elders (from *presbuteros*) may also be designated presbyters. Overseers (from *episkopos*) may also be termed bishops. Shepherds (from *poimaino*) may also be called pastors. Consequently, since each word describes the same persons as the other five words do, an elder is a presbyter, bishop, overseer, shepherd, and pastor. Please note a preacher is not, just because he is a preacher, a pastor. This word refers to one of the plurality of men who oversee the work, acting as shepherds, feeding the flock.

### FOREWARNINGS ABOUT DEPARTURE

God, through His inspired Word, warned about departures in general, including in the area of leadership, before such departures ever took place. “We are on safe ground when we say that any change in doctrine or organization from that found in the New Testament is a departure.”<sup>1</sup>

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold (Mat. 24:10-12).

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:28-31).

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? (2 The. 2:1-5).

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and *commanding* to abstain from meats, which God

hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (Heb. 2:1).

Therefore, recognizing God's warnings were given before the fact, none should be surprised that what God predicted came to pass.

### **THE ATTITUDE BEHIND THE PROBLEM**

While looking at the history of departures is important, let us not forget the attitude which brought about the first step down the long road that has brought so many to their doom. From the passages listed above, two characteristics of those who would lead men away from God stand out—deceit and pride. It seems the latter is the moving force behind the former. Men of pride want to be seen, to be known, and to be recognized as somebody. When that cannot be accomplished by following the Word of God, such men often are not averse to turning from the Truth to fashion a poisonous concoction of half-truth in order to advance themselves. In reality, they become enemies of the Truth, unwilling to submit themselves to the authority of Deity, yet perfectly willing to speak “perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30).

Such a man was the infamous, and condemned Diotrephes, who loved to have the preeminence, and actively opposed any who dare to challenge his ungodly position. Of him, John, inspired apostle of love, wrote.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbideth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church (3 John 9-10).

Sadly, many of his spiritual descendants still move among us.

### **TESTIMONY FROM THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS CONCERNING EARLY ORGANIZATION**

The uninspired writings of the men generally known as the Apostolic Fathers (so-called because they lived near the time of the apostles or were those who had known an apostle or apostles), shed light on the organization of the early church during the time of around A.D. 100-150. One of the early writings, thought to have been composed around the end of the first century was sent from the church at Rome

to the church at Corinth. Clement, one of the elders of the church at Rome, serving along with Cletus and Linus, is thought to have been the one who penned the letter. While many important facets of the letter might be discussed, let us focus on the point before us—the leadership of the church established by the Christ, the Son of the living God.

This uninspired letter from Clement refers to the “bishops and deacons” of the church. One is reminded of Philippians 1:1: “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” Thus, at the close of the first century, as evident from this letter, there was no difference made between elders and bishops. The bishops and deacons were shown to be the “officers” of the church, with a plurality of each, in each local congregation, and serving that congregation only. No scholar of repute, regardless of his religious affiliation (or lack of such) denies that in New Testament times the local church was (after the apostolic teaching) overseen by elders and served by deacons, and that all other systems of church government and organization came later.

Another uninspired writing of the same period, though some thirty to fifty years later, is the *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. It also speaks of the bishops and deacons of the local church. Again, the evidence is that there were no other church offices and that no office was held by men above the local eldership. Though not written as a treatise on church organization, its notation of that organization, common in the church of the day, and according to God’s revealed will, is an additional and valuable proof.

Polycarp’s letter, addressed to the church at Philippi, and written around A.D. 115, is another important testimony to the fact that the church continued, at least for some time, without departing from the apostolic pattern. In it, he mentions the elders and deacons, and counsels the church to submit to them. Likewise, Papias, writing about A.D. 140 referred to the presbyters of the local church as its leaders. So, too, did Hermas, in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, written around A.D. 150. He wrote of the elders who have the charge of the church.

In all these uninspired writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers, there is agreement. Each speaks of those who had the oversight of the local congregation in accord with the inspired writers of the New

Testament. None gives any hint of a system in which bishops were over elders. None refers to a distinction made between bishops and elders. Therefore, we may conclude from the evidence that up to the year A.D. 150, there was no such distinction made by men for they recognized there was no such distinction made by God.

### TESTIMONY FROM THE APOLOGISTS CONCERNING EARLY ORGANIZATION

Following the age of the Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists arose. These were men who had set forth a defense, or apology, of their faith and practices. While these writings, as the writings of the aforementioned group, are the writings of men, they have a distinct value in that they present a historical picture of the church in their day.

Among these was Irenaeus who, unwittingly, began a tradition to which others would appeal and upon which they would build. Near the close of the second century, in an effort to withstand those who attacked the Truth and promoted heresy, he wrote several books called *Against Heresies*. In them he tried to trace a succession of bishops back to both Peter and Paul, who, according to Irenaeus, founded the church in Rome. He hoped that by so doing, he could prove the Scriptures, to which he held, were truly the ones given by God through inspired men.

Interestingly, Irenaeus did not mention Peter as the first bishop (or pope) of Rome—or any of the later innovations affecting congregational autonomy, nor did he write of a hierarchy with its center in Rome. The simple reason for these omissions is that no such departures as these had yet taken place. However, the groundwork was being laid.

Following Irenaeus was Tertullian who also sought to defend the verity of the Scriptures. Like Irenaeus, to accomplish his purpose, he appealed to the tradition of the beginning of the Roman church in his work, *On Prescription of Heretics*. He recognized the church at Rome as an example to others, yet he did not seek to place it above other churches. That would be the work of those who followed, and who used the works of these men as leverage to push their positions.

Among those who acknowledged a distinction between bishops and elders was Hippolytus. Following a division in the Roman church, Hippolytus was selected as the bishop of one of the groups. He disputed the course taken by some in Rome and contested those selected

as bishops of the other group. Still, he was against a church government centered in one man in Rome.

### THE BEGINNING OF DEPARTURE

The first step in departing from the New Testament pattern of church organization was the making of a distinction between bishops and elders. As noted above, this step was gradual in its taking place, as most departures are. Congregation by congregation, the idea of one man rule over the local church was adopted. Some followed this practice thinking it was the way to prevent a departure from doctrine—by entrusting the safekeeping of the congregation to one man, thereby ensuring unity, and preventing departures into heresy. Such was the rationale of Ignatius of Antioch who had argued for one man, called the bishop, to be over the local church with the elders and deacons serving under him. Ignatius encouraged church members to look upon the bishop as they would upon Christ, and upon the elders as they would upon the apostles of Christ.

From the planting of this seed grew the system known as the monarchical episcopate, or one-man rule in oversight. Apparently, a seemingly innocent and appropriate practice may have led to the departure. It was not unusual for an eldership to select one of the elders to preside over the meetings of the eldership. Over time, the presiding elder took upon himself more and more authority, ultimately supplanting the authority of the eldership. He eventually became known as the bishop to whom the eldership submitted, and under whom they served.

As members and elders looked to the bishop for guidance, he gained more and more influence. He was the one who was expected to make decisions necessary to the continuance and well-being of the congregation. In times of doubt or danger, he was the one to whom the brethren turned. In the work of the church, his was the voice of authority. Because of his leading the church in evangelizing and in establishing other congregations, the newly established churches would look to him. Thus, step-by-step, the position of monarchical bishop was solidly entrenched, its influence broadened, and its acceptance nearly universal.

With the help of men such as Cyprian of Carthage, champion of the hierarchy, came the development of a priesthood of “clergy” apart from the “laity.” Along with the development of the monarchical epis-

copate, the rise of the man-made priesthood hastened the downfall of the church. Distinguishing between members in the clergy/laity system brought changes in the worship. No longer could a regular member take part in conducting the public worship. This development led to ceremonial ritual and elaborate display as replacements for simple worship according to the New Testament pattern.

As the architects of this departure had looked to the Old Testament system of the Levitical priesthood for their pattern, they also concluded that only priests could lead in worship, and that only worship conducted by priests was acceptable worship. They ignored the Bible's teaching that all baptized believers in Christ are priests (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6). In their man-made system, the high priest was the bishop, and the elders served as priests under him.

### THE CONTROL OF COUNCILS

Before His ascension, Christ had claimed all authority in heaven and earth (Mat. 28:18). As the head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18), He has the power to determine the rule by which His people walk (Gal. 6:16). It is His doctrine which has been delivered unto us, and by which we are to be governed (2 John 9; Rom. 6:17; 1 Tim. 1:3). It is Christ whom we are to hear (Mat. 17:5; Heb. 1:1-3). In spite of clear instructions to the contrary (Mat. 15:9), religious leaders of the rapidly apostatizing church began to meet in councils to determine church doctrine and policy.

The first of these councils was called by Constantine the Great. Following more than two hundred and forty years of persecution at the hands of the emperors, Constantine acted as a friend of the church (of that day) and passed several laws intending to aid it. Realizing the benefits to himself and to his empire of befriending the church and of promoting unity within it, he called the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 to settle a dispute concerning the nature of Christ. However, the question of the nature of Christ would not soon be settled as later councils were called to determine what the official position of the church would be.

Constantine paid the expenses of the 318 bishops who attended (though almost none of them came from the West; that is, Rome, and the bishop of Rome did not attend), and with gifts and allowances he bought their favor. In return they allowed him, though he had not been baptized, and, consequently, was not a member of the church (Acts

2:38, 47), to chair the meeting and effectively determine the decisions it reached. In this way, the beginning of control by the head of state came about. Of the decisions made by the council, one in particular would lead to further departures. The council formulated the office of metropolitan bishop, or Patriarch, and by their decision elevated the bishops of certain cities (Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch) to that status.

Other councils followed, among them the Council of Chalcedon in 451. This council made a decision which the bishop of Rome zealously disputed, for it had decided that the bishop of Constantinople was equal in power to the bishop of Rome. While the first several of these ecumenical councils were called by the Roman emperor, the latter councils were either called by or greatly influenced by the one who sat as pope. In the decisions of the councils was an ever growing tendency to exalt men, and ultimately to exalt one man as the universal head of the church, which decision was, no doubt, influenced by the organization of the civil government which they so admired.

While some in the past, such as Cyprian of Carthage, had elevated the bishop of Rome, those in Constantinople claimed equality for the bishop who resided there. In this ongoing dispute, several factors served to Rome's advantage. The church in Rome was reputed to have been established by Paul and Peter (though we have no record of Peter's ever having been there), and Peter was said to have been the first bishop of Rome and the rock upon which the church was established (from a misapplication of Matthew 16:18). From him, the bishops and popes who came later claimed succession as the vicar of Christ. Likewise, Rome was recognized as the capital of the world, and the church there had been known in the past for its many good works and evangelistic zeal. From this background, Leo the Great (serving as bishop of Rome from A.D. 440-460), made his assertion of supremacy over the bishop of the East, and became the one recognized by many as the first pope.

### **THE RISE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC SYSTEM OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

Departing from the New Testament pattern in one point usually leads to departure in many points. As men gave themselves more authority which God had never given, they slowly developed a more sophisticated system of organization with more and more layers of

authority. The Roman Catholic system claimed Christ had given to men on earth the power to act on His behalf and in His place.

With the development of the Roman Catholic priesthood came the idea that the priest taught with the authority of Christ, stood in His place between man and God, formulated laws (both spiritual and civil) by which God's people were to be governed, and determined who was saved and worshiped acceptably. Without recognition of the power of the priesthood, and submission to it, none could be baptized, confirmed, partake of the Lord's Supper (termed the Holy Eucharist), or be married unless the priest performed the act or conducted the ceremony.

The function of the priest was circumscribed by his position on the hierarchal ladder and by what were termed "Powers of Orders" and "Powers of Jurisdiction." Powers of Orders regulated one's rise, through a series of steps, to the position of priest. Powers of Jurisdiction referred to the geographical domain of the priest's authority. In ascending order, from Parish Priest to Pope, each position was given its specific duties and privileges. In Powers of Jurisdiction, each position upward involved oversight of those lower in rank, effectively producing a structure of checking, but more importantly, controlling, every priest, rural dean, vicar general, bishop, archbishop, and papal legate with ultimate responsibility resting in the one called pope.

### **THE POWER OF THE POPE**

The power of the pope, over secular affairs, was increased by emperors who were eager to work with the leaders of the church for the benefit of themselves. By granting to the church and its leaders land, gifts, and even broader control, the emperors thought they would secure their own control over the church. Such favors brought the emperors the ability to bestow certain offices of the church upon whomsoever they willed and bolstered their claims of being head over the church. Eventually, the pope came to be second only to the emperor in secular authority, and as far as the emperor was concerned (in most cases), second in spiritual authority. As the pope's and church's wealth and position grew, so grew the question and controversy concerning the headship of the church. Actually, God settled that question long ago, for that position belongs to Christ alone (Eph. 1:22-23).

Some popes were willing to play second fiddle to the emperor, but certain men achieved the office who were intent upon reversing the

order. Nicholas I, who became pope in A.D. 858, argued he was head over the church and over the empire in matters pertaining to religion. Following the split of 1054, the Eastern Orthodox or Holy Orthodox church, headquartered in Constantinople, emerged as a separate body. During this time Hildebrand, later to become Pope Gregory VII, was working behind the scenes to centralize authority in the papacy. Realizing the emperor and his subordinates gained control over church offices by giving the offices to whomsoever they would, one of the first things he did as pope was to call the Lateran Council of 1075, who decided only the pope had the authority to appoint priests and bishops.

The controversy would not be settled by a decree of the council. Innocent III, pope from 1198-1216, not only believed he was the head of the church, but also that the kings of the earth received their positions at his bidding. Through the use of the interdict against those rulers who opposed him, he gained control to the point he was instrumental in determining the selection of the Emperor. Other strong popes, such as Boniface VIII, solidified the pope's control over the secular by demanding that every person on earth, in order to be saved, must submit to the pope.

### **THE CALL FOR REFORM**

Though the church which claimed to be the church of the New Testament had been changed to something which was unrecognizable as that, there were those who still sought to do the Lord's will. No doubt, the great majority of believers had been swept into the political machinery of the papacy, but some insisted on a return to the Bible. So, in view of the many abuses, immorality, and ungodliness of the priests, as well as those who occupied the position of pope, some men began to call for a reform—and some paid with their lives for daring to sound such a call.

The Renaissance marked the transition from the medieval to the modern world. With it came a rebirth in learning, art, culture, and a new way of viewing the individual. Coupled with a decline in the strength and influence of the papal system and a call for accountability of the church's leaders, the Renaissance helped lay the groundwork for the changes of the Reformation.

The purpose of this chapter is not to discuss the Reformation; however, it is important to note that the failures of the Reformation to

accomplish a return to New Testament Christianity prompted men to sound the call to go beyond just seeking to reform the apostate church and to go back to the Bible. The Protestant denominational churches, which arose from the Reformation, were free of some of the problems of the Roman Catholic church, but (in not going all the way back to the Bible way) they failed to be the undenominational church for which Christ died (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). In reality, they added to the confusion and ushered in forms of church government which were as foreign to God's plan as was the wicked system of the Catholic priesthood.

### **THE RESTORATION OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY**

Trying to find the way through the fog of the Reformation was difficult for men who were seeking to restore the church. In throwing off the trappings of Catholicism, some were satisfied with minor improvement and sought no more. Other seekers often looked in the wrong places. Some, like James O'Kelly and Rice Haggard, meeting in Virginia in 1794, called men back to what they called cardinal principles of the church, one of which was that Christ is the only head of the church, and another was that the Bible is the only rule of faith.

The impressive "Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery" (1804), declared the intent of its writers to cease "making laws for the government of the church." They also called for the church to be self-governing according to the simple Gospel. Through the work of many, who sought only to do the will of God and to be Christians only, the church was restored. Included in that restoration was the restoration of the God-ordained system of church government: Christ as head of the church, and each local congregation under the oversight of godly men, qualified according to the Scriptures, selected and appointed by the congregation.

### **SUBSEQUENT DEPARTURES**

Sadly, some men cannot leave God's plan alone and, for whatever motives, seek to introduce plans of their own. Through the ensuing years following the restoration, men in the eldership have relinquished the oversight of the local congregation to embrace various substitutions. Majority rule (congregational democracy giving each member, and sometimes non-members, a vote), evangelistic oversight,

or one-man rule please some, but not God. The foolish claims of men to be modern day apostles, with the power to unseat elderships, are so far out as to be almost unbelievable, yet such has happened.

The idea that the elders are to lead as examples only (that is, that the eldership has no rule or oversight) is another departure. Another alarming departure, the inclusion of women in elderships, has been proposed and is reported to have taken place in some isolated instances. One can only wonder how a woman can be the “husband of one wife” (Tit. 1:6). More departures will take place as surely as the world continues to stand, but faithful children of God can still serve Him according to His will.

### CONCLUSION

God’s plan for church leadership is right and cannot be wrong. Furthermore, God’s plan will work. Men do not need to try to improve upon it (for they cannot) nor to change it (for they dare not). What men need to do is to demand that each local congregation be scripturally organized, and settle for absolutely nothing less.

How can we be sure the organization of the church is as God would have it to be? Go back to the Bible. Find therein the New Testament pattern for the New Testament church. Follow it. That is such a simple concept, but many still cannot see it (or perhaps they do not want to see it for it does not promote the ambitious, self-serving desires of the proud, ignorant, and lovers of preeminence).

However, for God’s children, there can be no other way than God’s way.

### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>F. W. Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, 1961), pp. 107-108. Having studied this book for the last twenty years, and having used it in teaching in local work, and, since moving to work with the Memphis School of Preaching, teaching a course on Church History with this book as the text, I am indebted to the work of its author, give credit to him for the background of the majority of the material in this chapter, and commend the reader to obtain and to study carefully his excellent work.

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# LORDING IT OVER THE FLOCK

H. A. “Buster” Dobbs



Buster Dobbs was born and reared in Houston, Texas. He was educated in Houston, having studied at the University of Houston and South Texas College of Law. He is married to Martha DeWoody Dobbs whose mother was a Starnes from which family came a number of elders and preachers. Martha's father and grandfather served as elders. Buster and Martha have three children and eight grandchildren. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather served as elders. His great-great grandfather was a Gospel preacher. His most important training came from godly parents.

He has spent his entire preaching years in Houston, having begun to preach at the age of fourteen. During his teenage years, he preached for the West End, South Houston and Fairbanks (later West 34th Street) churches in Houston. As a full time preacher, he preached eight years at Lyons and Majestic, seventeen years at Memorial, and the past fourteen years, as, first, preacher, then elder, and then preacher, again, at Fleetwood. At present, he is preaching, on a temporary basis, for the Klein Area church in Houston. Buster is a debater and writer. He is Editor of the **Firm Foundation** and is giving full time to speaking at lectureships, Gospel meetings, writing and working with congregations that have special needs (problems).

Elders are not slave-drivers. Still, elders must make decisions and the church must respect their authority. To strike a balance between overseeing the flock and flogging the flock is not always easy, but it can be done.

The New Testament says,

The elders among you I exhort...Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to *the will of God*; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Elders must “tend” the flock and exercise “oversight.” The word *tend* is from a word meaning “to feed, to keep, to rule, to govern.” The word *oversight* is from a word meaning “to oversee, to beware”; this word is translated “look carefully” in Hebrews 12:15.

Elders must be vigilant, informed, and able “to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers” (Tit. 1:9). They are to be on the lookout for any danger that threatens the peace and spiritual prosperity of the local church.

Elders, of course, do not have the authority to override biblical directives. They can neither change the teaching of God's Word nor give permission to disregard the commands of Scripture, whether positive or negative.

In all other areas affecting the work and worship of the church, elders have the final say. The members of each local congregation are under the injunction to "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit *to them*: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this *were* unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

Power can corrupt, and it often does so. A great American writer said, "You cannot have power for good without having power for evil, too. Even mother's milk nourishes murderers as well as heroes." This warning has been often sounded, and elders need to pay attention to it.

It is doubtless for this very reason that Simon Peter, after telling the elders to exercise oversight (which may literally mean "take charge") then says, "neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you."

One of the best known examples of a cram-it-down-your-throat attitude, which is part of what the apostle had in mind, is the famous case of Rehoboam. This foolish son of Solomon was asked to make things a little easier for the people than his father had done, but he answered, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto: my father chastised you with whips, but I *will chastise you* with scorpions" (2 Chr. 10:14). This hateful answer to a reasonable request caused the nation to split; Rehoboam lost much of his kingdom and went down to a fool's grave.

Elders should be wise men, and wisdom dictates that the opinion and desires of others should be considered. It is not the business of elders to be nothing more than pulse-feelers and poll-takers. An elder who stands with a wet finger in the air to see which way the wind blows (that he may go in that direction) is no leader. An elder who is no leader is no elder, though he may hold the title.

Still, to listen to advice (and take it if it is good) is a quality of true leadership. Elders who are so vain that they will not hear the bleating of the sheep may lose many a lamb to wolves and bears; they will spend much of their time wondering where the flock has gone.

An elder must neither abdicate his authority and oversight nor insult the intelligence of others by refusing to consider what others suggest

and recommend. When all the facts are in and every reasonable voice has been heard, the elders must make the decision and take the consequences.

Bishops in the Lord's church must be careful to never lord it over the flock. The word translated "being Lords over" is found four times in the Greek New Testament. Two gospel writers record that Jesus said, "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them" (Mat. 20:25; Mark 10:42). Gentile princes sent heralds before them commanding all to "bow the knee." They were arrogant because, like Nebuchadnezzar, they could kill or keep alive at pleasure. Jesus said to His followers, including elders, "Not so shall it be among you."

The word also occurs in Acts 19:16 where we are told that "the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and mastered [lorded it over] both of them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." This boisterous conduct does not become a true leader. The man in whom the evil spirit was jumped on and beat up the strolling Jews of Acts 19; but that is not proper conduct for elders in the church, nor for any leader. If the boss at work commanded you, "Here is a job I want you to do right away, and if you don't, I will slap you, spit in your face, give you a swift-kick, fire you, and send you home in disgrace. So get busy, keep your big mouth shut, and do the work without delay," how long would you stay on the job? People do not like to be talked down to nor bossed about. (Frankly, I don't know of any elders who would do such a thing, but I am trying to make a point.)

The fourth occasion of the appearance of this word is in First Peter 5:3 where the apostle tells elders they must not lord "it over the charge allotted to them." That is, "You are not to leap on them, and master them and prevail against them, and run them out of the house naked and wounded."

In other words, Do not abuse your power. Be considerate of others. You must not be highhanded and unapproachable. You have power but use it with discretion.

Elders must remember they are stewards. The church does not belong to them. It is, as Peter says, "the charge allotted to you," or as the King James Version says, "God's heritage." The church was purchased by the blood of God's Son; it is not the property of elders. It is

“allotted” to them. They are assigned a responsibility to take care of the property of another. Every elder must remember that he is an under-shepherd, answerable to the Chief-Shepherd. If the sheep are abused the under-shepherd will have to give account to the owner. Having in mind who owns the flock will help to avoid the mistake of lording it over the sheep.

Elders in the church must consider the flock as the heritage of God and treat them accordingly. They are not to be lorded over, but they are God’s people, and should be treated with love, meekness, and tenderness for the sake of Him to whom they belong.

Take note that Peter was a fellow-elder and also an apostle, but he did not assert his authority but rather “exhorted.” He did not claim to be “prince of the apostles, nor vicar of Christ,” and throw his weight around by commanding others. An apostle-elder would doubtless have the right to make demands, but Peter did not do so—he exhorted, which means he invited, invoked, implored, beseeched, and entreated. The example of Peter is a lesson for all elders.

Elders are to feed the flock, which does not mean that elders must personally do all the teaching, but it does mean they are to provide the pasturage. Shepherds lead the sheep into pleasant valleys and beside still waters; they sit on the hillside watching over the flock and keep a keen-eye out for ravening animals (read, false teachers).

The elders at Ephesus worked with both Paul and Timothy in providing a spiritual diet for the saints. The elders do not force-feed the flock the way Chinese force-feed geese. They make the milk and meat of God’s Word available and encourage the disciples to enjoy the banquet. The members of the fold that will not eat suffer from malnutrition and gauntness. The shepherd provides the opportunity and entreats participation, but he does not badger and browbeat.

Each disciple is personally obligated to “Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). It is the duty of parents in the home to teach the wonderful things of God’s Word to their offspring. “Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). This teaching is to be ongoing. Every opportunity is seized for teaching self and family.

Elders admonish each lamb to maintain a good spiritual diet. Bishops in the Lord's church remind the members of that body to avoid spiritual anorexia and bulimia, which are fatal. Like David of old, we must learn to "delight" in God's law "both day and night." Under the Old Law the Jews were told to "teach them [the words which I command thee] diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deu. 6:6). Under the more glorious law of Christ, shall we do less?

What is an elder to do? He is to tend the flock and exercise oversight but not lord it over the sheep. If the members of the body do not do their duty, how may an elder respond? If a false teacher appears in the congregation, how do the elders react? It should be pretty obvious that the warning to not lord it over the charge allotted to them does not mean that elders may not take firm and decisive action when the life of the sheep and the good of the church are in danger.

Elders would be in an impossible situation if they are called upon to care for the heritage of God but not allowed to set programs and policies and insist upon participation. It would be like a parent called upon to nurture a child but not allowed to feed or discipline the young one. If elders can only kowtow and beg, toady to and lick the boots of those they would lead, their position is hopeless. It would be better for them to have millstones tied about their necks and cast into the depths of the sea. They must have some power or they are ruined. **To be a leader one must turn his back on others**—the leader cannot lead while facing the crowd.

"Most ladies and gentlemen," Lewis H. Lapman wrote, "wouldn't know a leader if they saw one. If they had the bad luck to come across a leader, they would find out that he might demand something from them, and this impertinence would put an abrupt and indignant end to their wish for his return."

The thing that keeps an elder from lording it over God's sheep is their willingness to do what they ask of others. No one should ever request of others what he is not willing to do. If I ask you to dig ditches, I ought to be willing to ply the shovel. It is never good leadership to ask others to do what one is not willing to do. If I ask you to wash my feet, I should be willing to wash your feet. If I want you to

be present for all services, read the Bible, teach a class, reach the lost, and pray without ceasing then I should be doing the same.

This is the meaning of Peter's exhortation to elders to not lord "it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock." No one can be accused of lording it over others if he pulls at the oar as vigorously as is expected of those under his charge.

Theodore Roosevelt said, "People ask the difference between a leader and a boss....The leader works in the open, and the boss in covert. The leader leads, and the boss drives."<sup>1</sup>

The elder is to practice saintliness, self-sacrifice, shamefacedness and all other Christian duties he recommends to the people. He does so from a willing mind, regarding the flock and not the fleece.

Elders must serve for the good of others. They set aside self-interest for the sake of others or for a belief or principle. They make personal sacrifice and self-abnegation, which their service requires, but not from a desire to enrich themselves. It is not for "filthy-lucre" that elders spend countless hours in deliberation and ministration, but from an understanding that "when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:4).

Anyone who serves as an elder for earthly gain and mundane advantage must be limited in judgment. The earthly deserts are few and the objections are many and the monetary advantage does not exist. A true bishop does not make merchandise out of the people of God.

Elders have hard work to do and heavy loads to lift. They do their work and make themselves a living sacrifice without complaint. Each member of the church should understand the precarious and often frustrating position of the under-shepherds of God's flock and be enthusiastically supportive of them. It is evermore difficult to know the wise and best thing to do in all circumstances. Christians ought to recognize this and bear with the elders, always putting the best possible construction on every word and act, which is what love requires whether dealing with elders or others—even enemies. If fidelity to Christ requires us to love our enemies, how much more does it require us to love our elders.

When God gave the Old Law to Israel through Moses, He said the day would come when the people would ask for a king. He then gave

some instructions to the king and told him how to rule successfully. Here is what Jehovah said in Deuteronomy 17:14-20:

When thou art come unto the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are round about me; thou shalt surely set him king over thee, whom Jehovah thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee; thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee, who is not thy brother. Only he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he may multiply horses; forasmuch as Jehovah hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of *that which is* before the priests the Levites. and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear Jehovah his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them; that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children, in the midst of Israel.

Elders would do well to heed this advice and make it standard for their conduct. It is a magnificent lesson in leadership. Notice what God told the king to do:

1. He is to be one of you and not a foreigner—the leader must identify with the people he would lead (v. 15).
2. He is not to be warlike (multiplying horses) (v. 16).
3. He is to be free from covetousness, or greed (v. 17).
4. He is to be morally upright and set a proper example (v. 17).
5. He is to be a master of the law of God (vv. 18-19).
6. He is to fear God (v. 19).
7. He is to “keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them” (v. 19).
8. He is to be humble (v. 20).

The elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to *the will of* God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away (Simon Peter, apostle of Jesus; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

**ENDNOTE**

<sup>1</sup>Theodore Roosevelt, 1858-1919, Binghamton, NY, speech, 24 Oct. 1910.

# WOMEN AS ELDERS AND DEACONS?

*Flavil H. Nichols*



Flavil Nichols preached his first sermon when he was 15 years old. He began his 63<sup>rd</sup> year of preaching in May of this year. He is the oldest son of the late Matilda and Gus Nichols. At his father's death (in 1977) he declined the Elders' invitation to succeed him at Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama, because he did not want to follow his father. But, after Bobby Duncan was there for seven and one-half years, Flavil accepted the invitation to move to Jasper, where he preached until retiring from local responsibilities. Since 1989, he continues to live at Jasper, but preaches in revivals, speaks on lectureships, and fills other special engagements. For five months in 1996, he served as "interim minister" at the Forest Park Church

of Christ in Atlanta, Georgia, while those elders (in his words) "searched for a GOOD Preacher!"

Flavil was born near Jasper, Alabama. From Freed-Hardeman he received an A.A. degree in Bible. That University honored him at their annual banquet during the 1997 Lectureship. He later attended the University of North Alabama, at Florence. His wife, the former Mary Hardin, and he have two children and three grandchildren. Resident local work has taken him into Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee; but he has preached in more than twenty states and in three foreign countries. He serves on the Board of Trustees of Childhaven, Inc., (an orphans home at Cullman, Alabama), and of Faulkner University, Montgomery, Alabama. His articles have been published in several gospel papers. He served two different terms as Editor of **Words of Truth**, a weekly journal begun by his father in 1962, and which is still published by the Sixth Avenue church.

## INTRODUCTION

I am sensitively conscious of the responsibility that rests upon all who teach. "Be not many *of you* teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment" (Jam. 2:1, ASV). Our responsibility is awesome! We are obligated under heaven to faithfully proclaim the divine revelation. We also owe God the reverent handling and faithful proclamation of divine truth, without addition, subtraction, or crook (Gal. 1:6-9)! We owe each hearer plain and simple instruction in the way of righteousness, and considerate persuasion to walk therein, that they—and we—may "escape the damnation of hell" (Mat. 23:33)! Our task is not always pleasant, for God says a preacher

should “Preach the word; be instant [urgent; ASV] in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine [teaching; ASV]” (2 Tim. 4:2). This obligates each preacher to teach God’s Word when people like it and to preach it even if men do not like it.

God’s Word is the final authority—the only authority—in religion. Jesus Christ, our Savior, declared: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day ” (John 12:48). By the Word of Christ all shall be judged (Rev. 20:12). Even in the Old Testament, God’s Word was to give them light. “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psa. 119:130). “Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). Therefore, He demands that His Word be respected. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). Under the gospel of Christ, “if we walk in the light” of God’s revealed Word, “we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Jesus instructed His apostles to “take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Mat. 10:19-20). Later, the apostle Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit selected the very words that inspired men spoke (1 Cor. 2:9-13). He also based an argument on whether a noun used in the Old Testament (“seed”) is singular or plural (Gal. 3:13).

### **GOSPEL CAME FROM THE FATHER THROUGH CHRIST**

God the Father gave His Word to Jesus Christ, the Son. It did not originate with His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus clearly affirmed: “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, *whether* it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:16-17). He declared, “he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him” (John 8:26). Hear Him repeat this claim: “I speak that which I have seen with my Father” (John 8:38). Jesus plainly asserted, “the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:10). He explained, “the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me” (John 14:24). He

assured His disciples: “all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15). Our Lord Jesus Christ affirmed, “I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:49). He also declared, “even as the Father said unto me, so I speak” (John 12:50). One more such claim should be superfluous, but hear Him again, “All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15).

Jesus instructed the apostles to preach what He had taught them. “What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops” (Mat. 10:27). In the “Great Commission,” Jesus directed the apostles to teach

all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever **I have commanded you**: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world (Mat. 28:19-20).

The Gospel originated with the Father. It was passed on by the Son to the apostles, who were directed to preach it to every creature in all the world.

### **GOSPEL FROM THE FATHER THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE APOSTLES**

Jesus repeatedly and clearly affirmed that what He taught originated with God, the Father. He knew, however, that the apostles could not remember everything He had taught them during His three years (plus) with them. Christ clearly taught (1) that His doctrine originated with the Father. He just as clearly asserted (2) that the Holy Spirit also would obtain from God the Father the gospel. (3) Subsequently He—the Holy Spirit—would enable the apostles to preach the gospel without error. Hear Jesus on this point also: “Take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Mat. 10:19-20).

Christ does not have to say a thing forty times to make it so! Yet, hear Him again as He talks to the apostles on this very point: “But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

The night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to the apostles:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for **he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak**: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:12-13).

In fulfillment of these promises, Jesus returned to the Father, who sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles (Acts 2:1-4). Through the apostles, the Spirit thus preached the gospel of Christ “among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-49). On Pentecost Day (Acts 2), the apostles spoke “as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Their message pierced the hearts of the hearers. The multitude was converted by the truth preached by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. “Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, *and* said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

That day the church was established, and “they continued stedfastly in the **apostles’ doctrine**” (Acts 2:42). This is the doctrine that originated with God the Father. It was first revealed to the apostles by Jesus Christ, and then was brought to their “remembrance” by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). They, thus, “preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (1 Pet. 1:12). This is the reason that the anathema of Heaven rests on any man—or angel from heaven! — who “would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6-9)!

The church in the New Testament is circumscribed by divine law. From its very first day it was taught by the apostles, and “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42) to have the approval of God. To the congregations throughout Galatia, the apostle Paul wrote, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8) Hear him reiterate this same vital principle in the next verse: “As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:9). At first, they had the gospel in inspired men. We now have that same truth in the inspired book, the New Testament. They had the gospel, the new covenant, in oral form; we have it in written form.

## **MUST HAVE BIBLE AUTHORITY**

In the first century A.D., the church had the “doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9-11) in the apostles and other inspired men. By the Holy Spirit, they put that same truth into written documents, so we now have that exact identical gospel in an inspired book—the New Testament. Nothing is right in religion unless it is authorized in the Word of God. The wrath of God will be exercised against any who pervert that gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

This principle is still valid: “Where the Bible speaks, let us speak; and where the Bible is silent, let us be silent.” Those who are loyal to the Word of God still respect the silence of the Scriptures, as well as embrace what it specifically authorizes. One who “goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God” (2 John 9-11, ASV). This principle applies to every aspect of our religion—including the terms or conditions of salvation, the organization, name, and government of the church, as well as to all matters pertaining to our worship.

## **“ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH”**

Churches of Christ today strive to be identical with what the church in the first century was taught to be. Christ is the head of the church of Christ—its only head (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23). He has “all authority...in heaven and on earth” (Mat. 28:18). Under Christ, each local congregation is independent and autonomous, regulated only by the New Testament. Each local church is ruled by elders, and served by deacons, who are chosen because they possess certain qualifications required in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The apostle Paul “ordained them elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). He left Titus on the island of Crete to “set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee” (Tit. 1:5). Certain specified traits or characteristics, often called “qualifications,” are required of those to be appointed. With no legislative authority whatsoever, elders “rule” as “executives” in churches of Christ today, as they did in the first century (1 Tim. 5:17). They are encouraged to “rule well,” enforcing or applying the doctrine of Christ.

## **MALE ELDERS AND DEACONS AUTHORIZED**

The Holy Spirit revealed God’s description of individuals who were to be selected and appointed to the eldership (1 Tim. 3:1). He chose

the Greek word for males (Greek *aner*). I am firmly convinced that the Bible is verbally inspired! Although the Greek word (*anthropos*) for “mankind” in general was available, God’s Holy Spirit selected the word that means the male of the species—not simply a member of the human race. He could have chosen another word, but did not! Hear Him: “If a **man** desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). Hence, only **men** can serve scripturally as elders or deacons.

### BROTHER WOODS’ COMMENT

Brother Guy N. Woods was a great Bible student. For many years at Freed-Hardeman University he conducted *The Open Forum* each afternoon of the annual lectureships. He was asked, “Is it *scriptural* for a woman to lead in public prayer?” Brother Guy N. Woods answered:

I do not believe that it is. It is not possible for a woman to qualify as an elder (1 Tim. 3:1-6), as a deacon (1 Tim. 3:12), as an evangelist (Titus 2:15; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12), which creates a strong presumption that it was not God’s intention that women should be involved in the oversight of the church, nor actively engage in its public ministrations; there is no hint of such activity by women in the records of the early church; and, those instances involving public [sic] always specifically indicate that men, not women, participated. (1 Tim. 2:8; Acts 20:7-12). These considerations would not, of course, apply to family and private devotions; but, *Christian* women will shrink from *any* public activity which would subject them to the displeasure of their Lord!<sup>1</sup>

### TEACHER IS OVER A CLASS

The teacher of any class is “over” that class. (1) The teacher has authority over the class, to call it to order, to make assignments, to maintain proper decorum, to guide the discussion, and to dismiss the students at the end of the class. (2) The teacher may call on any one student, and may interrupt that one to hear from another. (3) The teacher may authoritatively say, “Let us now leave that topic, and take up another subject.” (4) The teacher is empowered to make assignments, and to require certain work of the students. (5) The teacher has authority to keep after class any student for various reasons. Surely these facts show that the teacher is “over” the class. Conclusion: since a teacher is “over” the class, a **woman** may **NOT scripturally** teach a class in which there is a **man**. God’s Word plainly says, “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man” (1 Tim.

2:12). The Greek is translated in the American Standard Version: “to have dominion over a man.” In the Revised Standard Version it was translated: “to have authority over men.” The (Roman Catholic) Confraternity version says: “to exercise authority over men.” (The idea of her “snatching,” or “seizing” unlawfully such authority over a man, is not in the Greek text. The original language signifies simply the concept of a woman’s wielding or making use of authority “over the man,” which the apostle Paul forbids.)

### TEACH A MAN VS. TEACH “OVER THE MAN”

Immediately someone inquires: “Did not Priscilla—a woman!—help her husband Aquilla to teach Apollos in Acts 18:26?” And the answer, of course, is: Indeed she did! But there is a difference between “teaching a man,” and in “teaching **over** the man.” For example: a woman may teach a man while they eat together, or while they travel together, or in any other informal setting. In such a group, no one is “over” the other(s) present. But we have seen (above) that a woman is divinely forbidden to teach “over the man.” The teacher of any class is “over” each person in that class, as we have observed. Therefore, a woman may not scripturally teach **a class** in which there is a man, or a plurality of men. Remember however: she may teach a man in any informal setting—so long as she is not “over” him (1 Tim. 2:12).

### MALE LEADERSHIP AUTHORIZED

We saw in the beginning of our study that the Bible is the verbally-inspired Word of God. Completed (as it was) before the end of the first century A.D., it claims to be an adequate and infallible guide for man. Note the array of evidence against “women elders” in this one passage. (1) The Holy Spirit specified that leadership roles belong to the male of the species: “If **A MAN** desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). This text specifies only males for the eldership. (2) The next verse affirms that “a bishop then must be...the **HUSBAND** of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; see also Tit. 1:6). No woman on earth can meet this qualification. (3) “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” (1 Tim. 3:5). If God said it only one time, that would be enough! But notice that repeatedly the Spirit bars women elders.

## NO HINT OF SUPERIORITY/INFERIORITY

Divinely designated leadership roles do not even remotely suggest nor in any way indicate that males are superior to females. Neither is the submission of women to male leaders any token that they are inferior to males. Rather, it is a recognition of God's divine order of things for His church.

### NOT "MERE CUSTOM" NOR "MALE CHAUVINISM"

The fact that leadership responsibilities in the New Testament church were divinely placed on males is clear from various passages. This is a matter of divine revelation through the apostles. It is not an outgrowth of sexual prejudices of the first century, nor the result of social customs of that era. Neither is it rooted in male egotism, conceit, nor pride. Every time the "headship" of man over woman is referred to in the church, it is linked to the story of creation (Gen. 1 and 2). Notice these references with me.

### MAN CREATED BEFORE WOMAN

In the glad morning of time,

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26-27).

In recapping the story, we read: "the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18).

But for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man (Gen. 2:20-23).

The Devil tempted Eve to eat of the fruit which God had forbidden them to eat. After our "Grandmother" Eve yielded to the Devil's temptation and sinned; she led Adam also to sin with her. She believed the Devil's lie, that they could eat that forbidden fruit and not

die. But Adam did not believe the Devil. Hence to the woman God said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16).

### LOOK AT FIRST CORINTHIANS 11

Ever since creation God has been the head of Christ, Christ has been the head of man, and man has been the head of woman. To the Corinthians the apostle Paul wrote, "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman *is* the man; and the head of Christ *is* God" (1 Cor. 11:3). This was not so simply because society decreed it; it was true because that is the way God arranged and ordered it to be so from creation.

"Man is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man" (1 Cor. 11:7). This difference is not based on custom, nor social mores, but by divine decree. Man "is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man" (1 Cor. 11:7). Whether or not we can explain all this Scripture involves, it is nevertheless an added reason why man is given the headship over woman.

"The man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man" (1 Cor. 11:8). Adam was not created out of a woman's rib. However, Eve was made out of Adam's rib.

"Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:9). Woman was created to fill man's need for companionship. It was not the reverse, with man being created to fill woman's need for a companion; nor is man a helper adapted to her needs.

Not one of these reasons why man is to have the leadership is based on, or grows out of, social customs. Each of them is rooted in God's created order of things. God created man and woman, and gave to man the headship over woman. For any woman to take the leadership role, such as would be involved if she served as an elder or a deacon, would violate God's eternal purpose.

### EPHESIANS 5:22-24

To the church at Ephesus the Holy Spirit directed these instructions:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto

Christ, so *let the wives be* to their own husbands in every thing (Eph. 5:22-24).

### 1 TIMOTHY 2:8-12

To a young preacher the apostle Paul wrote, “I will therefore that men pray every where” (1 Tim. 2:8). In this passage, the Greek word for “men” is *aner*, which designates the males in contrast to females. He could have used a Greek word which designated humanity in general—but he did not! The inspired apostle directed women how to adorn themselves, then added, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:11-12).

In the English language, the prepositional phrase “over the man” modifies both verbs in this sentence. I am aware that the grammatical construction is not exactly the same in the Greek, but the English translation precisely parallels the sentence structure in Acts 4:18. Peter and John had healed a lame man, and boldly preached Christ when they were brought to trial (Acts 4:8-12). Sending them aside, the rulers conferred, then “called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). Here both verbs “speak” and “teach” refer to (or, are modified by) the same prepositional phrase “in the name of Jesus.” They were commanded not to “speak” **in the name of Jesus** and not to “teach” **in the name of Jesus**.

Compare this with First Timothy 2:12: “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man.” The apostle did not allow a woman to “teach” **over the man**, nor to “usurp [exercise] authority” **over the man**. Remember: we have seen earlier that a woman may **teach** a man, but she may not teach “**over** the man.” Note well this distinction.

Paul then cited some reasons why a woman is not to be in the leadership role. “For Adam was first formed, then Eve.” By right of his prior creation, man is to be out front—leading—rather than be led by a woman. Adam was here first, and Eve was the “late-comer.” It is unbecoming and unscriptural for her to assume any leadership role in the church.

“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14). The first time woman stepped forward and took the lead, she plunged the whole human family into

sin and rebellion against God. Her disobedience separated the entire human race from God, which demanded the sacrifice of Christ for our sins! This is one Bible reason the Holy Spirit forbids any woman a leadership role in the church. Appointing any woman to be a deacon or an elder would violate this clear passage.

God has given womankind the role of childbearing and motherhood. As a faithful wife and devoted homemaker she can wield tremendous influence over her family. “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world!” However, she must be a faithful Christian, one who continues “in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety” (1 Tim. 2:15).

### TITUS 2:3-5

The apostle Paul gave the young preacher, Titus, instructions for various groups. He first directed him to teach what aged men should be and do. Then he wrote,

The aged women likewise, that *they be* in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Tit. 2:3-5).

No woman should be appointed to the eldership, nor serve as a deacon in the Lord’s church!

### 1 PETER 3:1-6

Likewise, ye wives, *be* in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation *coupled* with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward *adorn ing* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

No part of this instruction prepares a woman to serve as an elder or deacon in the Lord’s church!

### SUMMARY

The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write, “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:12). This is enough for Bible believers! If there

were not another verse in the Bible on this topic, that would settle it. But recall with me numerous additional arguments from the Scriptures. (2) In the order of creation: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman (1 Cor. 11:4). Woman is nowhere designated as head of man. (3) “Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:13). Leadership resides in him by right of his prior creation. (4) Man is “the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man” (1 Cor. 11:7). (5) “The man is not of the woman; but the woman” (being made of his rib) is “of the man” (1 Cor. 11:8). (6) Adam was not created for the woman, but the woman was created “for the man” (1 Cor. 11:9) to provide him with companionship. (7) In Eden, Adam was not deceived by the Devil. However, the first time she took the leadership “the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14). (8) Woman is to submit to her husband (Eph. 5:22), as the church is subject to Christ (v. 24). (9) Men (Greek: *aner* = **males**) are to “pray every where” (1 Tim. 2:8). This is never said of woman. (10) Woman’s realm or sphere is in the home (1 Tim. 2:12-13). (11) Only a “man” (Greek: *aner* = **male**) should desire to be a bishop (1 Tim. 3:1-6). (12) Each elder and deacon “**must**” be a “husband” (1 Tim. 3:2, 8, 11-12). No woman on earth can qualify for the eldership or deaconship.

### CONCLUSION

It has been said that behind every successful man there is a supportive **wife**—and a surprised **mother-in-law**! Another said that if you ever see a turtle on a fence-post, you know he did **not** get there by himself! Godly women wield a powerful influence in the church, as well as in the home and community. In addition to being models for their daughters, they train their children to become Christians, and aid them to become useful servants of God. Many of them have converted their husbands and other family members. They encourage and motivate their husbands and sons to qualify to become elders, deacons, song leaders, Bible class teachers, and gospel preachers. Let each Christian wife and mother wield a godly influence by her own faithful life and her quiet demeanor. But let no woman ever seek to usurp any public leadership role in the church of our Lord.

**END**

From this record in Genesis we learn several reasons why leadership roles are given to man—not to woman.

(1) Adam was created first. Leadership is man's by right of his prior creation. Woman was the latecomer!

(2) Adam believed God when He said, "Thou shalt surely die" if you eat of that fruit, and he was not deceived by the devil's lie. However, the woman was deceived.

(3) Adam did not entice or lure his wife to sin with him—it was the other way around! Eve enticed Adam to sin with her. Doubtless the consequences of her sin were a million-times worse than she could possibly have imagined they would turn out to be! But it is just as impossible to "un-commit" a sin as it is to "un-blow" a whistle, or to "un-ring" a bell! Thank God for His love that forgives and His grace that pardons!

**ENDNOTE**

<sup>1</sup>Guy N. Woods, *Questions and Answers: Open Forum, Freed-Hardeman College Lectures* (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1976), 1:362.