



THE ELDERSHIP

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PREFACE

I am firmly convinced that the greatest need in the Lord's church today is for solid, sound and sensible elders. When qualified men are appointed to the eldership the local congregation will excel in doing the Lord's work. When unqualified men are appointed to the eldership the Lord's work is handicapped. When there are no qualified elders the local congregation is often plagued by numerous personality and pride issues.

We have problems in the church today with unsound and contentious preachers. Qualified elders in congregations that have such problems will stop the mouths of the trouble makers. We have problems in the church today with apathy. Congregations with sound elderships will be encouraged by their loving shepherds to develop a deeper love, commitment and conviction toward the Chief Shepherd. We have difficulties in the church today with arrogance. Good elders will show the members how to be humble. We have problems with ignorance. Qualified overseers will firmly, soundly, lovingly and patiently educate the flock. There is no greater and more important work!

I have been blessed for the past several years with the opportunity to work under an eldership that loves the truth. The men under whom I serve are determined to keep the local church sound. They expect, require and demand of me that I preach the whole counsel of God without compromise and in love. One of the men in that eldership is the author of this material. He is a man who loves the Lord, loves the Gospel, loves the lost and who loves his brethren. He is dedicated to his work as an elder and devoted in his love for the church. He is a man most certainly qualified to prepare this material for this video series and workbook.

It is my hope and prayer that many congregations will benefit from the material in this workbook. May God bless all who love and obey our great and gracious God.

Kevin Rutherford

THE ELDERSHIP

Lesson 1: Elders Are Servants

The role and function of an elder in the churches of Christ has been divinely planned (Titus 1:3; Acts 14:23). In Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church in the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. These congregations of Asia Minor had only recently been established and yet Paul and Barnabas were able to find qualified men to serve as elders.

In this first lesson on the eldership we will direct our attention to the pool of men from which to select the congregation's leadership. The members of any congregation of the Lord's children are made up of servants. All Christians are to be faithful servants ministering to others and ministering for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Many future problems will be avoided if we consider the aspect of servant-hood when selecting men to be elders. With that in mind we are going to talk about the importance of being a servant, the importance of preparing and training servants, and then we will talk about the fact that those who want to serve as elders will need to understand the duties involved.

A servant is defined as a person in bondage. These individuals are in subjection to our Lord. The concept of a servant carries with it the ideas of spiritual, moral and ethical subjugation to our Master, Jesus Christ. Let us talk for a moment about what makes a good servant.

Paul and Barnabas' appointments of servants to the eldership were made rather soon after the founding of these congregations. Hence the characteristics and qualities of these men must have been easily observable. A good servant whose efforts and capabilities are genuine, evident and sincere can be discerned and utilized. In our time we do not have the same perspective of what servant-hood really means. Bondage is a recognized condition of being a slave. A slave is compelled to serve the master. The will of the master takes priority over all else. The work of the Master is not one in which we are forced to serve, but we serve out of love. Love drives out fear (1 John 4:18). Brother Guy N. Woods in his commentary on this verse states that confidence excludes fear.

The fear of serving in various tasks is the best tool Satan has to reduce the effectiveness of the congregation. The statement, "I can't", has never saved one soul or retained one member of the flock. God is not a cruel "Master" to be feared by those who faithfully serve Him, but rather He is a loving Father. Servants should not allow fear to stop them from becoming elders.

Brother Woods further remarks, "Fear that is absent from genuine love is the fear of the whip in the hands of a master, the dread of chastisement which comes from disobedience". The fear of judgment is a characteristic of imperfect love (not mature). Such a fear of everlasting punishment should have long past from our concerns by the actions of our service. This is the strength which God requires of His servants (Psa 19:7-11). As elders we should ever keep those verses before us as we journey toward heaven while rejoicing in the service of our Father.

Just as it is important for elders to be appointed from among servants, so it is important that they be appointed from among those who are prepared servants. A coach at the beginning of the playing season must select his starting lineup from the talent available, and this is what congregations must do also. However, some congregations, which have been in existence for ten years, twenty years or more and have not appointed elders, are clearly lacking in godly servants. A godly servant will do what the Master commands (Jn 14:15). This would involve preparing oneself to serve as an elder because God desires elders in all congregations.

Because a servant is required to serve, a training period may be needed to teach him how to serve. However, this does not excuse a lifetime of unproductive and unfruitful living. The thirty to forty years taken by many congregations to appoint elders shows a failure to develop the personal skills necessary to serve. The continued excuse for the lack of personal development and maturity to serve as elders will not be acceptable and hinders the cause of Christ. Failing to train servants to become elders often leads to disharmony in the house of the Lord.

The tasks to be accomplished by servants in the church are as follows: leadership (elders), physical duties (deacons), evangelist (minister), teaching the Word (all members), singing (entire congregation), leading prayers (all male members), giving (all who are wage earners), and many others duties necessary for the congregation to function in spreading the Word.

The Master requires these tasks to be accomplished so as to bring the congregation to maturity (Eph 4:11-16). The entire membership must desire to serve in one of these roles, train for that service, and then perform the assigned task if the family is to grow. Some years ago I was serving as a deacon and one of my tasks was to give the announcements. The men who were to serve during worship always gathered in a small room to organize and pray. On one occasion the six men selected to serve the table were asked who would be doing the prayers for the Lord's Supper. The six men felt their only duty was to pass the elements and none volunteered to lead the prayers. The deacon in charge of the worship had to go out into the congregation and get two men who would lead the prayers. The sum total of Christian servant-hood in those six men was over one hundred years! This is *not* maturity! We must prepare ourselves to serve if the bride of Christ is to be properly adorned at His return.

Servants who are prepared to lead as elders will understand the service indicated by the words God used to describe this office.

The Scriptures give three terms to define the duties of the eldership:

1. Elder: Greek *presbuteros*
 - a. An aged person
 - b. A position of responsibility

2. Shepherd/Pastor: Greek *poimen*
 - a. One who tends flocks
 - b. One who guides

3. Bishop: Greek *episkopos*
 - a. An overseer
 - b. An office

The linkage of all three of these terms is found in Acts 20:17-28 and in 1 Peter 5:1-2. Wayne Jackson's book *Before I Die* shows this linkage for 1 Peter 5. Here Peter admonishes the elders (*presbuteos*) to tend (*poimaino*) the flock and to exercise oversight (*episkopos*). These verses indicate that the terms elders, bishops and pastors all describe the same office. In the same book brother Jackson points out that these words come to stand for a special, qualified group of men whose function on behalf of the church is to teach, guide, watch out for, protect, feed and when necessary lead in disciplinary procedures.

Furthermore, these terms indicate what the responsibilities of the elders are. These responsibilities show us the office of an elder is for those who are willing to work and not for those who want to be a figurehead or simply an "officeholder". It should also be considered that the office does not imply or carry with it the power to alter or change God's Word. Rather, the very nature of the position is to provide stability and protection for the Word once delivered. Any person accepting the role of an elder in the church needs to be mindful of Jude 3. The Gospel has been ONCE delivered and the elders must contend earnestly to maintain the purity of the Word. The phrase "contend earnestly" means to wrestle or put forth effort to fight off the wolves who will devour the Gospel and divert its message.

The message is for all times, all people, and it is with salvation for all (Rom 1:16). No other message will produce the divinely sanctioned plan of salvation. The warnings of Revelation 22:18-19 and Galatians 1:8-9 must be kept in mind. The greatest weakness in the church today is a failure to put forth the effort to maintain doctrinal purity. This failure can often be tracked directly to the eldership. Error must be stopped in the congregation whether it started from the pulpit or the classroom. Elders must be aware

that error is an infective spiritual disease that can lead to the spiritual death of the local body.

Now, let us take a little more in depth look at the words used to refer to elders through a study of *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. We begin with the word "elder". This tells us the one who will serve as an elder must be a person who is mature. Though the word "elder" also indicates one who is older we must recognize that chronological age does not always produce maturity. A person who is mature should have acquired certain skills and knowledge (Heb 5:14). This verse needs special attention because it reveals how to bring a congregation to maturity by training or exercising the mind. Note in verse 13 of that chapter the writer uses the word "child" or "babe." What adult male is still sucking a bottle and purchasing pureed meat products? None should be doing so. Will a mature Christian be able to go beyond the milk and delve into the meat? An elder will be a spiritually mature Christian who can understand the milk and the meat of the Word. He should not still be sucking on a spiritual bottle.

Note what Paul tells us about improper spiritual diets in Ephesians 4:14. Do we not see this very thing in congregations? We are being led astray by "cunning craftiness". The best cure for this is to get our nose into the Word, read it, meditate on it and live it. This is the most effective tool to maturity. Servants who do not study the Bible frequently cannot be prepared to serve as elders.

Hebrews 5:14 tells us solid food is for "...those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." What are our physical senses? They are sight, hearing, touching, tasting and smell. In a similar way we have spiritual senses. The spiritual senses are being able to hear, see and understand the truth. Elders cannot be those who are blind to the truth (Mt 15:14). Elders must be those who will hear the truth, understand it and make application of it. Matthew 13:14-15 speaks of those who cannot hear or see because their hearts have grown dull. We have too many elders in the church with dull hearts. Such men are not qualified to serve in this capacity. Elders should instead be like the disciples commended by Christ in Matthew 13:16,17. Those who could see and hear the truth. These are such that will be able to exercise their senses to discern both good and evil.

The word "elder" means a mature person and one is not mature unless he has the skill to discern good and evil. Isaiah emphasizes the necessity of this skill in Isaiah 5:20. The ability to discern the difference between good and evil can be obtained by the reading and study of the Scriptures, reading brotherhood publications and keeping abreast of secular affairs that affect the church. The hiring of a qualified minister does not absolve the eldership of proper preparation in discerning good and evil. An example will illustrate this point. An elder of a congregation was presented a verse in defense of a scriptural truth. The elder responded by saying, "that happened back then and over there and does not apply to us today". This kind of failure to determine and defend the truth will cause serious harm to the body of Christ.

An historical example may also help us in understanding the importance of an elder's ability to discern good and evil. Nazi Germany and Communist Russia were led astray by the cunning craftiness of Darwinian evolution and Marx's *Communist Manifesto*. Those led astray by Nazism and Communism also included some who considered themselves to be Christian theologians. Though they claimed to be Christians they allowed themselves to be used to foster racial purification in Nazi Germany. Elders who can discern both good and evil will be wary of being used by our own politicians that have pushed and fostered abortion, homosexual rights, euthanasia and embryonic stem cell research in our communities.

The word "maturity" means someone complete in natural growth (2 Cor 13:9). Could the failure to be complete have been a factor in the divisive, rebellious and tongue speaking Corinthians? In 2 Corinthians 13:10 Paul refers to an edification process. It would appear that factions, reveling at the Lord's table, and the elevation of tongue speaking over prophecy was due to a lack of knowledge (Hos 4:6). Think about the space of time between Hosea and Paul. Hosea wrote from about 750 B.C. to 710 B.C. whereas Paul wrote 2 Corinthians about 56 A.D.. This means that about 800 years of time had passed, but God's people still had the same problem. That problem was a lack of knowledge which contributed to a lack of spiritual completion or maturity. Sadly, some of God's people today still suffer from the same ignorance. Elders are mature men who will not be ignorant. They should never be those who are categorized as lacking in knowledge.

The elder must also meet the qualifications laid down by Paul to Timothy and Titus (1 Tim 3; Titus 1). The person having met these should be capable of providing spiritual care and exercising proper conduct of the Word. Hence, the combination of maturity and overseeing are vital links in the Lord's plan for the church.

The second word denoting the duties of an elder is "overseer." This is one who supervises, direct works or observes. The use of this word shows us that elders do have authority. Because elders are those who have authority over the local congregation they must be the ones under consideration in Hebrews 13:17. There we are told, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." The elders have authority over the local congregation while submitting to Christ and His Word (Eph 1:22,23; Col 1:18).

An elder must oversee, but he must never overlook. If he fails to observe error, consider the proper direction for the flock or see trends in the congregation resulting from too much secularism he has failed as an overseer.

A good working job description for an elder, bishop or shepherd is a mature male who oversees and tends a group of people. A relaxed attitude toward sin, or a disre-

gard for sin, will result in missing sheep. The elder must have a righteous anger toward sin. The anger of Christ drove the merchants out of the temple. Righteous anger controlled by love is a must for a sound eldership. What is righteous anger? Paul appears to be sanctioning righteous anger in Ephesians 4:26. A righteous anger hates injustice, immorality, ungodliness and other sins. Jesus expressed such on two occasions; once in the temple (Mt 21:12) and once in the synagogue toward the Pharisees (Mk 3:5). The quotation from Ephesians 4:26 is taken from Psalm 4:4. Look at the whole counsel that David writes in verses 2 and 3. Going from glory to shame, worthless love and seeking falsehoods are the nature of the wicked. The Lord has established the godly to do His will. The “wait and see” attitude for an eldership is a sure sign of a dying flock. If a shepherd loses his flock he must feel a sense of righteous anger in order to restore it. In many cases the disease of apathy has mortified our senses and concerns. James teaches as much in James 5:19-20. A novice leading the flock is like a hireling who will flee when troubles arise or who is easily distracted from his duty.

The third word used to refer to the office of an elder is “pastor”. A pastor is a person who tends the flock. Elders are shepherds who answer to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:25; 1 Pet 5:1-4). The tending of a flock implies work, service and monitoring to maintain the integrity of the congregation. Spiritual injury will be the outcome of an unattended flock. The spiritual injury to the individual congregation and the church as a whole is a direct result of the elders not ferreting out the wolves and healing those wounded by the actions of those wolves (Acts 20:28,29).

If more attention were given to spiritual shepherding rather than to the budgetary and building matters we would not have so many shifting currents in our congregations. The word “shepherd” should indicate this is not just an office to be held, but a duty to be performed by a faithful servant.

The words “maturity”, “shepherd” and “overseer” can be found in a good English dictionary. A mature shepherd is a person who protects, guides or watches over a person or persons. Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10:11. A good shepherd will find good water, nutritious food and proper shelter (Psa 23). When this happens the flock will grow and prosper.

Finding good spiritual food for the flock involves giving the flock a steady diet of solid and sound teaching. Elders must remember who it is they serve. They serve the Master, Jesus Christ. The Master is the only one who has the power to change the pattern of worship, legislate new doctrine or forgive sins. He paid the price (Rom 5:9), we belong to Him and the eldership must defend that position. A righteous servant would never circumvent, obscure or countermand an ordinance of God. The defense of the Word is so important, hence a good working knowledge of the Word is essential for defense and offense. The recognition of uncertain sounds in the brotherhood is one of the constant vigils of an eldership.

A proper discourse on shepherding is found in John 10. A study of verses 2,3,4,11,12 and 14 will reveal the proper course to take. In verses 2 and 3 the concept is one of entry. The doorway to the eldership is found in the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. In addition to this prerequisite we find that a doorway allows entry into the flock. The open door policy of good management techniques does not apply in the church. We must screen those who would enter. The screening process will remove many potential predators as Paul warned in Acts 20:29. The eldership must protect the flock, sometimes even from other elders (Acts 20:29). Any uncertain sounds or erroneous teaching must be quickly dealt with (Titus 1:9-11). In congregations so eager to obtain numbers, elders will overlook a few blemishes to increase the size of the flock. Jude 4 should be a constant reminder of the importance of the gate keeping function of the eldership. Early elders had allowed certain men to creep into the church unnoticed. These were ungodly men who turned grace into lewdness and denied Jesus Christ. Note also the failure of the church in Thyatira to remove "Jezebel" (Rev 2:20). Her teaching rent asunder the congregation there. God was set to destroy her and all who supported her (Rev 2:22).

The Lord states in John 10:4 an effort must be put forth to bring the flock out of the shelter and into the pastures. The shepherd, after taking the sheep from the pen, leads them to the pasture for that day. Experience on the farm has shown this to be true in a literal sense. Figuratively this is very important in congregations as well. When being led to green pastures the sheep must listen to the voice of the shepherd. The voice of the shepherd for the church from the first century to the present is Jesus Christ. Because the elders are following the example of Christ in being shepherds the sheep must learn to listen to their voices as well. This means that an eldership must be speaking the same thing as Christ, and to one another. If too many different signals are given the sheep will become confused. The scattering of the sheep by these conflicting commands will cause the sheep to go astray and be easily picked off by predators.

The Master has given His sheep's care to earthen managers. When the flock is lost, scattered or destroyed then someone must be held accountable. A characteristic of a good shepherd is for the flock to know his voice. How can a congregation recognize the voice of an elder if the elders never speak to them? Fulfilling the qualification of being "apt to teach" will overcome this problem. In my observation some elderships never present any lessons or speak directly to the congregation except for leading an occasional prayer. Elderships should not hire a minister and place him before the congregation and feel their job is now complete.

Brother Leroy Brownlow wrote a book entitled *Making the Most of Life*. In that book he has a chapter devoted to the subject of responsibility. He concludes that chapter by saying, "A responsible person makes a living, correctly handles the Bible, seeks salvation, uses his ability, takes advantage of opportunities, is concerned about others, is cautious, pays his debts, honors his contracts, keeps his word and watches his deeds." That is a good thought to keep in mind for all servants, including elders. A

faithful servant will be mature, responsible and obedient at all times. Prepared faithful servants make good candidates for the eldership.

LESSON 1 - QUESTIONS

1. Who gave authority for elders in every congregation of the Lord's people? (Titus 1:3 and Acts 14:23)
2. The eldership of a congregation comes from what source?
3. How is the word "servant" defined?

What is your concept of a servant in today's world?
4. What does 1 John 4:18 state?

Does the change your view of training for the eldership?
5. Should all male servants prepare for the eldership?

Give a reason for your statement.
6. The role of an elder is an inherited position in the Lord's church such as the Aaronic priesthood. True or False
7. How do the actions of Ephesians 4:11-16 bring a congregation to maturity?
8. Give the Greek definitions for the Biblical roles of elders, bishop and pastor.
9. Does Galatians 1:8-9 apply to the role of an eldership?

How?
10. Does chronology define maturity?
11. What is righteous anger?
12. Which has the highest priority, spiritual shepherding or budgetary matters?
13. How does John 10 apply to the shepherds of today?

14. How do elders allow or dismiss the efforts of people who “creep” into the flock?
15. How is a congregation to recognize the voice of the shepherd?

THE ELDERSHIP
Lesson 2: Qualifications
1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work” (1 Tim 3:1). The word “bishop” translates the Greek word that means “overseer.” Acts 20:17,28 shows us that the overseers, or bishops, are the elders. If a man has a desire to be an elder he is desiring a good work. However, desire alone is not enough to qualify a man for this extremely important work. Paul gave further qualifications for this office in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:5-9. These qualifications must be met or a man should never be appointed as an elder whether he desires it or not.

It is very important the he desire the office. The word “desire” needs to be examined. This word can involve either good or evil intent as noted in Colossians 3:5 and Romans 10:1. The Greek word found in 1 Timothy 3:1 is *oregomai* meaning “stretching oneself out for a thing, longing after it as related to the object desired.” In modern use it is defined as “expressing a wish to obtain, ask for, or request.” It is an expressed wish.

A person should never be forced into the position of a shepherd, nor should incessant pleading be applied. The one who desires the office must be a person with a background of proven service to the immediate congregation. We must remember this is an elevated form of service in the Lord’s kingdom. Therefore one must desire the office in order to serve the Lord and not for the purpose of emphasizing himself. A man must not think in his heart that it is all about him, but rather he must realize it all is about the Lord. One who does will understand the importance of fulfilling all the qualifications given.

If one is qualified for a particular work it means he has the necessary skills, knowledge and credentials. Though the word “qualification” is not specifically used in the New Testament to refer to the characteristics of elders, the concept is certainly there.

The qualifications of the elders are qualities that should be present in any godly servant in the Lord’s church. If not, those servants must mature and grow so that they may achieve these gems of character. Paul had already seen these qualities in the men he and Barnabas had appointed even before he wrote about them to Timothy and Titus (Acts 14:23). They had observed the men who were leading the early church, and had seen them proven in persecution. The elders of the first century were the frontline between society and the church, and they serve in the same fashion today. When persecutions arise and false doctrines are taught the elders must remain steadfast. They are much more likely to do so if they truly fit the qualifications set forth in the Scriptures.

As I discuss the qualifications of elders in this second lesson I will be drawing from Wayne Jackson's recent book *Before I Die*, and Robert Taylor's earlier book entitled *The Elder and His Work*. In addition to gleanings of wisdom from these two authors I will be approaching some matters from my own experience as an elder. It is hoped that the material here presented will be practical and helpful for those who are selecting elders for the local congregation.

Before we go to Paul's discussion of the qualifications for elders, let us first read what Paul had to say in Ephesians 3:10-11. Paul wanted the Ephesians to realize the manifold wisdom of God's redemptive plan for all mankind, and the particularly important place the church has in that plan. The church is the pillar and foundation upon which the truth stands and from which the truth goes out to all humanity. The church is God created, and blood bought. Elders must carefully consider the important part the church plays in God's redemptive plan. It is their responsibility to provide the leadership, the example, and purity of doctrine for this divinely planned institution. This will only happen when qualified men are selected to be the guardians of the Word in this leadership position. If unqualified men are appointed to this work they may well become the hammer that destroys the foundation of truth in the local congregation.

Because the church has a vital role in God's plan we understand that it is very important for those who lead God's church to be qualified. We will begin our study of the qualifications of elders with an examination of the characteristics that are given in the negative. The apostle Paul cites six traits that must *not* be tolerated in the eldership. The elders must not be violent, they must not be quarrelsome, they must not be quick tempered, they must not be given to wine, they must not be greedy of money (or covetous), and an elder must not be a novice.

Let's look first at the fact that a man cannot be qualified to be an elder if he is an ill-tempered man. We recognize there is such a thing as righteous anger. Righteous anger is that which stems from a love for the truth. It is that which will lead the elders to correct and remove any error in doctrine or practice. However, there is an anger that should never be seen in elders. It is that uncontrolled anger that can lead to unchristian behavior.

Anger is defined by the two Greek words *orge* and *thumos*. The word "orge" is defined as a natural impulse, desire or disposition. This is the word used by James in chapter 1 verses 19 and 20. The word "thumos" indicates a more agitated condition of feeling that is often related to a person's desire to seek revenge. Anger, agitation, and action lead to violence. Violent behavior has never promoted Christian principles. It has always brought reproach upon the church and always will. A person with this attribute should never be selected as an elder and, in fact, should never even be considered in the first place.

Those who raise their voices in anger are verbal bullies. I have observed this behavior in elders, and have noted that those who do not control their tempers lose the trust and respect of fellow elders and of those who may witness the outburst. Brother Jackson reminds his readers that the church does not need “clenched fist bullies.” Elders should not be men who resort to fighting in order to have their way.

Some years ago a congregation was planning to use comic book super heroes to teach Biblical values at a youth rally. One of the problems with this approach is that these fictitious characters always use violence to triumph over evil. Elders must not resort to violence in an attempt to triumph over evil. Jesus could have used physical violence to accomplish His mission, but He did not.

The angry, quarrelsome and quick-tempered elder will seek to control the eldership and the congregation through intimidation and threats. While these threats will most likely be in the form of verbal rather than physical displays, they will still cause significant problems for the local congregation. Such men often seek to motivate people through fear, their superior display of fluency, and actions that will ultimately cripple the congregation and deter many good works.

A man who has been contentious or quarrelsome must repent and shows signs of repentance before he could ever be considered for the office of elder. Brother Taylor closes his section on this qualification with these sane words of wisdom: “Brawlers or contentious men never elevate the eldership; they always bring it low in the eyes of the beholders. This is a proposition that knows no exception.”

The person who has a desire to serve but who has a quick temper, short fuse, or hair trigger should be rejected. This means that the congregation is going to have to observe those who seek the eldership for a period of time in order to be able to identify this trait if it is present. A novice, or new person to the congregation, needs some time to prove himself worthy of this divinely planned position of service.

Another Greek phrase used in this context has to do with idea of being prone to anger. This would be the type of person who easily “flies off the handle” and can wreck more than he can build. Suppose you are using a hammer or an axe and the head flies off. The direction in which it flies and the damage that is done can be unpredictable. Elders with this attitude often make quick, rash statements which are difficult to retrieve.

An example of this kind of poor behavior was observed on an occasion when an elder shouted out from the pews during an announcement he did not like. The announcement had to do with a moral issue that was being voted upon in an upcoming election. The elder angrily blurted out his opposition to the announcement but never apologized to the individual making the announcement or to the congregation before which he had displayed his bad temper.

A man must control his temper at all times. An explosion with parts flying in all directions can never be reassembled by the best of talents available to the brotherhood. Church problems will try the patience of all because we are dealing with human personalities. These problems are magnified by elders who are quick to anger. How many souls have been lost by improper words spoken in anger?

Solomon was so right in his statements of wisdom found in Proverbs 14:29 and Proverbs 16:32. Solomon said, "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly." Solomon also stated, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." These words are just as applicable today as they were when Solomon wrote them. Concerning Solomon's words, Robert Taylor spoke of the need for elders to "heed, cultivate, and practice these sound words." We must realize that sinful behavior associated with uncontrolled anger leads to malice and mayhem.

The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write that elders must not be violent, quarrelsome, or quick tempered (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7). Each of these traits is accompanied by the Greek word "*me*" which means "not." The word "not" is always defined as to "keep away from." When this word is present it means we are to bar ourselves from acquiring these traits or attitudes. Historically speaking those who have been violent, quarrelsome, and quick tempered have torn asunder states, homes and the church.

In addition to being those who are not bad tempered, elders are told they cannot be self-willed. All elders need to have the same attitude exhibited by Christ when He said to His Father, "... not as I will, but as You will" (Mt 26:39). Titus 1:7 mentions the fact that elders are not to be self-willed. This term is not used in 1 Timothy 3. Acquiring this trait will never be a problem for elders if we realize who it is that we serve. The work of the church is to preach the gospel, edify the members, and care for the needy. God has given us this guidance so that we know what we must do. Though we may know what is to be done, problems often arise over "how" these things are to be done. The "how" has led to hard feelings, split churches and lost souls. Too many people have been too determined to have their way in matters of expediency. "I want it my way!" is the rallying cry of the self-willed.

Recently I visited an old family cemetery where my maternal great grandparents are buried. Near their gravesites was the grave of an old acquaintance of my youth. Inscribed on his tombstone were the words, "I did it my way." An elder of the church should never want to have this expression written on his tombstone. This kind of self-willed attitude has caused some elders to insist upon having their way on issues that have altered the church's function and mission. We could look at those who have departed to the left and have loosed where God has not. They are those who have given in to a very liberal view toward the Scriptures. Those who have gone astray in this manner have bowed to the idol of self-will and have brought shame upon the church. We could say the same for those who have departed to the right and have bound where

God has not. Those who are more restrictive than God have been worshipping at the same altar of self-will. They would rather have it their way than God's way. An elder must never be self-willed.

Adolf Hitler used to state, "It is my will!" for actions taken by the Nazi party. Hitler took this philosophy from Neitzche who spoke of the "will to power." Most self-willed people do not go to this extreme; but their efforts to obtain what they desire will cause disruptions.

A self-willed person who is given a position of authority will have a tendency to "lord it over the flock" (1 Pet 5:3) and be like Diotrophes who loved to have the preeminence (3 Jn 9). A person with the character of Diotrophes will often trample upon the Word of God by refusing to acknowledge the sound doctrine that is needed to edify the congregation. Guy N. Woods in his commentary on 3 John writes, "... the spirit manifested by Diotrophes is wholly foreign to the New Testament and opposed to the teaching of the Lord Himself."

An elder needs to be reminded daily of Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:21. "He who does the WILL of My Father in heaven ..." This one statement must serve as a guiding light within the eldership.

Let me offer a word of caution at this point. There are some who desire the office of an elder so that they may alter the proper, truthful, and divine pattern of worship. Listen carefully to sermons or classes taught by potential candidates. If a person listens long enough he will eventually hear the speaker reveal his true intentions.

Another of the "not" qualifications is the drinking of alcohol. An elder in the church must not be given to alcoholic beverages. Both the letter to Timothy and the letter to Titus contain this warning. The influence of alcohol is dangerous, unnecessary and can ultimately lead to the damnation of the individual who uses it. Terms that show the influence of alcohol are "brawler," "quarrelsome," "abusive," and the expression "looseness of tongue."

Some years ago the director of the Food and Drug Administration was asked if alcohol would be approved for use if it were just recently discovered. The director said, "No, it is too toxic." The damaging effects of alcohol are evident in hospitals. In the St. Louis area about one-fourth of all hospital admissions are related to alcohol use.

Robert Taylor remarks that any person who imbibes alcohol is not fit to be an elder. Wayne Jackson speaks of the concept of sober-mindedness to show that the use of alcohol is not acceptable. An elder cannot be sober minded, or clear thinking, if he drinks.

As a trained biologist, holding a doctor of science degree, I have observed the effects of alcohol on higher animal, plants, and microbes. Many animal species, and people have the ability to degrade and detoxify alcohol. When people drink alcohol it must be degraded and chemically modified for use in the cell. The degradation and detoxification processes produce by-products that are not conducive to good health. In other words, drinking alcohol is not good for the body.

The social use of alcohol is a cultural construction and not a Biblical one. The Bible is very open in warning about the abuse of this poisonous chemical. Proverbs 20:1 says, "Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." In Proverbs 23: 31-32 Solomon recorded these words for us: "Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper." The apostle Paul said, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18 KJV).

Many self-willed individuals will try to establish the social use of alcohol among Christians by trying to use the Bible to prove their case. These men and women have split congregations and homes over their desire to have alcoholic beverages accepted by the church. Is a beer or two between friends worth splitting a congregation over? Factionalism does not have the approval of the Lord. I see no difference in their approach to social drinking and the homosexual communities' approach to have the public at large accept their lifestyle.

I personally have in my possession two documents which contain many Biblical references which are supposed to prove that the social drinking of alcohol is Biblically approved. Such works are causing a lot of problems in the church. This damnable doctrine is dividing churches in this country on a regular basis now. You must be conscious of this issue when selecting men to serve. A little alcohol is too much and too much will reduce and nullify a good Christian's strength and example.

One of the teenage girls from our congregation recently visited the teen class in another state. That class was taught by a Christian woman and was for teenage girls. The teacher specifically taught the girls in that class that it was alright for them to drink a little alcohol. Did the elders in that congregation approve of this? Perhaps they did not even know it was being taught. Let us heed the warnings of the wise man who spoke of the "wine of violence" and the wine that is a "mocker." (Prov 4:17; 20:1)

The fifth negative qualification for elders is that they must not be greedy for money. Close to this is the statement that elders must not be covetous. The Greek word for "greed" is *philarguros* which means to love money. You can see this word used in Luke 16:14 and 2 Timothy 3:2. In 2 Timothy 3:2 Paul is warning Timothy of perilous days ahead when ungodly men will be lovers of money. If an elder is a lover of money then he is like the ungodly men Paul writes about.

If an elder is greedy he is not likely to use the Lord's money wisely. Elders must keep in mind that a treasure held here on earth will not bring interest in heaven. Some congregations want to keep big thick cushions in the bank to ease the burden when emergencies arise. Meanwhile they fail to have the foresight and faith to see the needs set before them. A prudent eldership will weigh all options and move to accomplish the best use of the funds. A greedy elder never sees a worthy project on which to spend the Lord's money. Elders must act with faith in our Lord to plan, promote, and implement good works. Too many missionaries struggle to survive, too many evangelistic opportunities pass us by, and too many possibilities for benevolence are ignored because greedy elders want to hang on to all the money. This is the most common failure concerning the use of the Lord's money in the church.

On page 94 of the book *The Elder and His Work* Robert R. Taylor, Jr. notes, "A man who loves gold more than God, silver above the Savior, and prizes money above the Messiah would be a miserable misfit placed into the eldership." The eldership is no place for greedy men.

The sixth and final negative qualification for an elder is that he must not be a novice (1 Tim 3:6). The word "novice" indicates a new convert, but it might also apply to someone who is simply new to the congregation. The problem with appointing a new convert to the office of an elder is that he does not have the knowledge to rightly divide the Word. The problem with appointing someone new to the congregation is that the congregation doesn't know him well enough.

I knew of a congregation who elevated a young man who was a recent convert from denominationalism. He began to attend liberal workshops along with the other elder and the congregation soon drifted into the Crossroads/Boston movement. This caused several members to leave that congregation.

Appointing a novice to the eldership will likely cause trouble for the local church, and may ultimately cause the appointee to become arrogant. Too many immature men abound in pride when they are appointed to a position of authority. This will cause them to "fall into the same condemnation as the devil."

This completes our examination of the "not" or negative qualifications. Now let's begin our review of the positive characteristics of the men appointed to the office of the eldership. The first of these positive qualifications is that a man be blameless. Does this mean that a man must be perfect and without sin in order to be qualified? On page 83 of his book *Before I Die* brother Jackson writes, "No man is perfect; no elder can be perfect." The characteristic noted here as "blameless" could also be stated as "being above reproach." Congregations should ask if anyone can point to a particular character flaw in this person. Does the person being considered wantonly partake of sins that would disqualify him?

The Greek word for “blameless” is defined as “unable to call to account.” If the congregation cannot recognize a flaw then perhaps there is none. I know of a person who was being considered for a position as an elder who was ultimately rejected for that office. In discussing his possible appointment it was noted that he liked to use foul language and tell crude jokes. He was a Sunday saint and a weekday sinner!

An elder must be temperate, vigilant and sober minded. A temperate person is one who has self-control. This characteristic must not be overlooked in the selection process. It is the self-controlled bishop whose conduct will be orderly and good. This qualification should be self-evident. Robert Taylor quotes brother L. R. Wilson as saying, “This qualification has been overlooked more than any other.”

We should not expect an ungodly man to be orderly in his behavior. For this reason the congregation is going to have to note the habits of the person who is being considered for the eldership. When observing the person who is being considered the following questions should be of benefit: Is the person habitually late for worship or tardy for class? Does this person have to be reminded about the completion of tasks and the keeping of appointments? An orderly person will keep up with such things. However, a disorganized congregation may have trouble recognizing an orderly person when they see one.

An elder is one who is “gentle.” Gentleness is one of the Fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. Notice in this context that word “gentle” comes just before “self-control.” The word “gentle” is defined by *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* as “fair, and moderate, with a sweet reasonableness.” The English dictionary defines the word as “kind, mild, amiable, and peaceful.” David Lipscomb said this characteristic means the elder is “not bitter or impatient, but kind in manner...” The Lord is the gentle Chief Shepherd. The elders are shepherds working under the Lord who, like Christ, must be gentle and patient with the lambs of God.

Bishops must also be just and holy. An elder has a duty to God and to himself to properly feed the flock. In order to do this appropriately he is going to have to be self-controlled and holy before God. Some may say this is a terrible burden to place upon the elders, but let us remember this is not as heavy a burden as the cross. Jesus said a man should “... take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Lk 9:23), and “Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me ...” (Mt 11:29, 30). Any elder who goes around complaining “woe is me” indicates he may not be dedicated to carrying the cross. We should keep in mind that with the help of the Lord the burdens associated with serving Him will be light and easy to bear.

Another of the qualifications given for shepherds is that they have a good report from without. Elders need to make personal application of 1 John 2:15-17. In this passage John gives us the sense that though we are in the world we must not be of the

world. When Jesus was praying to his Father He spoke of the same concept (Jn 17:14-17). Considering this qualification for elders should cause us to examine an elder's reputation within the community. What do the non-Christian associates of this man think of him? An elder's conduct in the church should match that of his conduct when he is away from his brethren. We have known some members who behaved one way when around Christians but, to our shock we found out they behaved very differently in the work place. Honesty and sincerity must extend beyond the doors of the church building.

The way our members behave in the outside world should be our best advertisement in the community. One who is a Sunday saint and a Monday sinner can cause more damage to the church than nearly anything else. It is very important that we do not overlook this seemingly minor trait. Many times the selection of an elder is based almost entirely upon how well he has attended worship and how he has behaved at those services. There is an old saying from my farm days that is appropriate to this discussion. "Sitting in a chicken house does not make one a chicken." By this same token "Sitting in a church house does not make one a Christian." Congregations that ignore the qualification of having a good reputation from without will regret it later.

The next qualification for discussion is the phrase "apt to teach." This is defined as one who is able to give instruction. One who is "apt" is one who has the necessary skills. Teaching skills are those that can be learned or developed. In my professional career as a college professor I noticed that it generally took new teachers three to five years to develop into good classroom teachers. One way for a man to gain the necessary teaching skills is for him to learn from those who are capable teachers.

We need to keep in mind the church classroom is not the same as the public school class room. In the church one does not need to have a college education in order to teach. However, teachers should make an effort to develop good teaching skills by monitoring effective teachers and by practice. The basic requirement for teaching is that one knows the subject matter. We should never put a novice in the classroom who has little knowledge of the Bible. On the other hand we have Christians who have sat in Bible classes for years and still say they are not ready to teach! Such a person is not qualified to be an elder.

A man not capable of teaching should never be placed in the office of an elder. The congregation should be able to see the elder teaching classes at least once a year. Preachers have their function, but hiring a man to preach does not give the eldership an excuse to sit back in the audience and say, "My work is done."

An elder should be one who continues to study God's Word in any form. We can never learn too much. I recently asked Robert Taylor at a lectureship if he had reached the bottom of the well in his study of God's Word. His reply was, "By no means have I found the bottom." The elders should always be studying and learning so that they can

continue to grow in their ability to teach. In his explanation of this phrase Wayne Jackson writes, "The bishop who sees no need to personally teach is lacking in his duty." Robert Taylor echoed this sentiment when he wrote, "This is an intense part of pastoring or shepherding the flock. This qualification needs to be met, not ignored or restructured."

Paul urged Timothy and Titus to select men who are hospitable. The Greek word here is *philoxenos*, which means "given to hospitality." This word implies the trait or habit of treating strangers as guests. The hospitable treatment of strangers is a common theme found in both the Old and New Testaments. The home of an elder should be a place to break bread and converse. A man who desires the office of an elder but who is shy or introverted needs to tackle this flaw and defeat it. An elder should be able to make a stranger feel as welcome as if he or she were at home.

Being friendly and sincere go along with the idea of being hospitable. A personal example shows the problem with a lack of hospitality. Some years ago my grandson and I were traveling in one of the Southern states. In our travels we were dropped off at a congregation about twenty minutes before Bible class began. No one spoke to us unless we first spoke to them. After services we had to wait fifteen minutes before our ride arrived to pick us up. Once again no one spoke to us. No one asked us if we needed anything. This is a clear example of an inhospitable congregation.

Paul told Titus that an elder should be a lover of good men. The Hebrews writer told the church that they needed the power of discernment to distinguish between good and evil (Heb 5:14). On the surface this may appear to be easy, but the devil can be deceptive. There will always be those who call good evil, and who call evil good (Isa 5:20). This means we must be able to tell the difference between what is truly evil and what is actually good. The wise king recorded, "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov 17:15).

The elder's ability to discern who is a good man is so important because of the widespread error that exists in the church. Elders will continually need to evaluate preachers, literature, lectureships, youth forums and a host of other events. The name over the door of the church building doesn't tell you whether or not a congregation is sound.

Paul also addresses the families of elders in his discussion of the elder's marriage and children. He must be the husband of one wife, and the behavior of his children must be proper. Many pages have been written and many hours of discussion given about the seemingly straightforward family qualifications. Some of the questions and discussions with regard to an elder's family have come along because there are some who are looking for loopholes. The Scriptures say that an elder must be the husband (male) of one wife (not bigamy), having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. The word "dissipation" is defined as "a dissolute mode of living, intem-

perance, the excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages.” “Insubordination” is defined as “disobedient or not submitting to authority.”

Many good questions have been raised concerning the family qualifications of an elder that need good answers. The first we shall address is the question, “Can a man with one child serve as an elder?” The answer is “yes” and here is why. The words “child” and “children” are often used interchangeably in Scripture. One of the most common examples is Genesis 21:7 which speaks about Sarah. The word “children” is plural, while the word “son” is singular. Both words are used with reference to Sarah but Sarah had only one child. In the New Testament passages such as 1 Corinthians 7:14 the plural word “children” is used and yet would obviously apply to those who have just one child. Consider Ephesians 6:4. Fathers are not to provoke their children (plural) to wrath. What about the father with only one child?

A question concerning divorce is often raised with regard to an elder’s wife. “If a man had a scriptural divorce and then later scripturally remarries could he be qualified to be an elder?” The Lord gave the only reason God allows for divorce and that is “fornication” (Mt 19:1-12). If the man’s wife cheated on him and he remained pure, then he would have the scriptural right to divorce and consequently remarry. This would make him the husband of one wife, thus fulfilling the qualification given for elders.

What if an elder’s wife dies while he is still serving as an elder? Should he resign? Did he not meet the qualification when he was placed into the office? He may resign if he wishes to. Paul does not elaborate on this matter. The Holy Spirit has left this up to judgment and common sense. It has been my experience that those who have opposed the elder all along will seize upon the death of his spouse as an opportunity to remove him from the office. Conversely those who have been satisfied with his work will not push for his resignation though his wife has died. Those who want the elder to resign will face the unpleasant task of deciding when they should approach the elder about his resignation.

What about a man with adopted children? Can he be qualified? Yes. Brother Jackson points out the fact that God is not interested in the elder’s reproductive capacity, but rather his ability to raise the child in a God approved manner.

What if an elder’s children depart from the faith once they are grown? How long is a person responsible for the behavior of his offspring? When they have families of their own and/or they are living apart from their parents they become responsible for their own actions. The principles taught in Ezekiel 18:19-20 apply to this case. In small congregations or those in small towns where general knowledge of an elder’s adult children would be known by many in the communities and especially if the elder took no effort to correct the situation or may approve it the elder should consider resigning before more reproach is brought on the congregation.

What if the child or children are killed in an accident? Should the elder resign? Hopefully these were godly children and they have now gone on to their rewards. How would this negate the fact that the elder was qualified and had obedient children? Who will go and knock on the door of this good and godly family and tell the elder that he must now resign because of the death of his children? How callous can some people be?

“Holding fast the faithful word” is another vital qualification given to elders (Titus 1:9). In spite of the warnings given by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-7 and Acts 20:28-31 the Gospel continues to be assaulted. Paul warned the elders from Ephesus that perverse men would arise among them who would divert Christians from the truth. The most common sources of divergence from the truth are the pulpit and the eldership. Elders must never compromise with error. Instead they must vigilantly remain on guard against false doctrine and false teachers.

When Solomon spoke of the whole duty of man he identified the fact that we must serve God, and that we must KEEP His commandments (Eccl 12:13-14). Consider this a statement of purpose, a command or a warning. God is telling us we must keep His commandments. This warning will not change no matter what men may think. The last warning our Lord gave to us in Revelation 22:18-19 carries this same admonition. We are to remain steadfast, love the Word, defend it, practice it and die with it being faithfully executed.

Now that we have covered the qualifications for elders let’s briefly address the problem of removing unqualified men from the eldership. The Scriptures don’t teach anything about the reaffirmation of elders. We don’t find an example in the New Testament of congregations taking a survey to determine whether or not they approve or disapprove of the current eldership. However, there are times when elders should and must step down. For example, illness can strike an elder as well as anyone else. If the illness impairs the elder physically or mentally so that he is not capable of doing the work he should resign. In fact, any mentally incapacitated elder should be subject to resignation.

Old age can impair an elder’s ability to function appropriately. Keep in mind that elders are shepherds and shepherds are those who must fend off the wolves from the flock. If a man reaches an age where he is not capable of battling those wolves he needs to step down. Think about David as a shepherd. He was the tending the sheep and not Jesse. The younger man was out doing this kind of work. Could age have been a factor?

The families of ill or aged elders need to step in and advise their husbands or fathers at such times. He should be told that he has done his duty, and now he needs to let the younger shepherds tend the flock. One of the functions of an eldership is to train

and prepare younger men to serve. There a time to place the baton into their hands so that they can continue the race.

When discussing the removal of an elder from office we should not neglect to examine 1 Timothy 5:17-20. If an accusation made by two or more witnesses can be brought against an elder that charge should be presented to the elder. If the accusation is true and he will not resign, the grieving parties must take it before the congregation. This is the only authorized method of removing an elder (other than self-resignation) that can be scripturally used.

The apostle Paul wrote, "This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work" (1 Tim 3:1). The eldership is indeed a good work. It is one of the most significant works that is done here on this earth. We need good men to desire this work, but they must be qualified men. When qualified men are appointed as elders the local congregation will be significantly stronger. This is God's plan and we dare not tamper with it. This is God's way, and God's way is always the best way and the only way.

LESSON 2 – QUESTIONS

1. Define the word “desire” using a Greek dictionary (such as Vine’s *Complete Expository Dictionary*).
2. Compare the concept of the eldership - is it about me or is it about the Lord?
3. Define “qualifications.”
4. What is the function of the church from the Lord’s perspective? (Eph 3:10-11)
5. Compare the role of qualified men and unqualified men in achieving the function of the church.
6. How does righteous anger fit into the accomplishment of the function of the church?
7. How does a display of bad temper foster the above agenda of the local congregation?
8. Is the work of an elder and the congregation compatible with the statement, “I did it my way.”?

How does it fit the statement of Jesus in Luke 22:42?
9. How does this attitude from the statement in question 8 fit 3 John 9?
10. How can a congregation discern the intentions of the elders if the congregation has never heard them?
11. Which is the proper method of discernment: “a man who is a good song leader but does not teach”, or “a good teacher who does not lead singing”?
12. Does the use of alcohol in any manner play a vital role in the selection process?

If not why not?

13. Does a person who gives sparingly provide the proper perspective for a good elder? (Consider both money and time)

14. Does the word “blameless” imply “sinless”?

Define both terms:

Blameless.

Sinless.

15. What is the probable attitude of a person, or an elder in particular, who constantly reminds everyone; “Woe is me.”?

16. Define the phrase “apt to teach.”

17. Is the best way to determine soundness of a person is to know that he a member of the congregation?

Why not?

18. Which of these are family units?

Family A - husband, wife and one child, or

Family B - husband, wife and three children?

Does God recognize one-child families? (Gen 17:19)

19. Do wicked children in later life (after they have left the home) disqualify an elder? (Note 1 Sam 8)

Did God cease to use Samuel after the report of his wicked children?

Should an elder of an unfaithful child or children not say anything about the matter or should he try to advise and exhort?

20. Name the two common sources of errors that arise in the congregation.

(1)

(2)

THE ELDERSHIP

Lesson 3: Leadership

In our first lesson we learned that elders are simply humble servants of the Lord and a part of His plan for the divine organization of the church. In the second lesson we discussed the qualifications for elders. With this lesson we intend to begin an examination of the practical aspects of the elder's work.

Our society can be divided into various functions or spheres, such as church, family, and government. All three are divinely established institutions. The family was established first as noted in Genesis 2:21-25. Initially we had within the family the earliest form of government. Those families were governed by the fathers and that form of governance is called "patriarchal." This in turn gave way to theocracy (God rule) in the period of the Judges, and later monarchy (king rule) which came into existence when Saul was anointed by Samuel in 1 Samuel 9-10. Though Saul was the first king for Israel, there had been earlier kings. The earliest mentioned monarch was Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, in Genesis 10:8-10.

The church is the last of the three divine institutions to be established. Jesus promised to build His church in Matthew 16:18 and the fulfillment of that promise is found in Acts 2. Jesus established His church on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem on, or around, 33 AD. The universal or world-wide church is divided into individual local churches or congregations. God planned His earthly congregations of the church to be overseen by elders, who are also known as bishops and shepherds (Acts 14:23). This is God's way of governing the church.

When considering the duties that lie ahead for elders in the local congregation it is important for us to keep in mind the three primary functions of the church. Those are to 1) preach the Gospel, 2) teach and edify the members, 3), give benevolence where needed. Any item falling outside these items listed should be carefully weighed by the eldership before proceeding. The elders are to be the leaders in making sure the congregation is faithfully engaged in these three aspects of church work.

Before proceeding any farther with our discussion of the leadership of the elders in these three areas, let us consider what is involved in the concept of "leadership."

Leadership is defined as: "a person who leads, a guiding or directing head." You will note the definitions as given in the dictionary are singular. When we are talking about the eldership we do not refer to one man rule over the congregation. The Holy Spirit did not read His definition from a dictionary; therefore we will need to change the person to persons. How do persons, plural, lead? The idea of self is dropped to become a single voice within a group. When many become one is not a textbook defini-

tion of leadership, however, this is the type of leadership God demands within His church. According to God's plan the interests of the individuals blend into the goal of the group. In the sense of many governing as one, the eldership is to be like the Godhead. The Godhead is made up of three distinct Beings and yet there is one God. An eldership is made up of a plurality of individuals and yet they must work together as one. This is a difficult concept but with prayer and effort this type of unity can be achieved. But in order for this to be achieved individuals must leave their personal views at the door and work as a group. This is why Diotrephes and those who want to lord it over the flock are not compatible with God's divine plan of congregational leadership and unity.

The leadership of the elders involves showing the way, guiding in direction, opinion, and course of action. Their leadership has the idea of influence others through sound reason. But, elders must remember there are limits to their leadership. Your responsibility is to your flock alone. You should not seek authority over another congregation whether or not that other church has elders. The circumstance is called "meddling": "to involve oneself or themselves in a matter without right, or invitation or to interfere officiously without being asked."

Congregations will and should interact in an extended community. However, an eldership in congregation "A" should not tell or attempt to direct the affairs of congregation "B." When Peter spoke of the eldership in 1 Peter 5:1-4 he said, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you." He did not say shepherd other flocks in other locations. If elders understood this matter many brotherhood problems could be avoided.

As the shepherds of the local flock, the elders are going to have to learn to cooperate with one another and work as a team. In a body of men with two or more, some will have better leadership skills than others. This talent, however, should not lead a humble servant to demand his way. It has been my observation both in the spiritual church (as an elder) and in the secular world (as a university professor) that we must recognize the differences in talents between individuals in leadership and use it to the advantage of the group. Does this mean to neglect the other elder or elders? NO. Each person will come to the eldership with different skills and talents. One elder might be good at providing plans and strategy while another may be efficient in implementing these plans.

Arrogance exists where individuals refuse to take wise counsel that conflicts with their plans. An elder must be careful not to invest himself in a plan he has drawn up to the point that he does not behave appropriately if that plan is later overruled by the group. When the planner and the plan have merged you may find trouble. A wise planner is willing to compromise (if possible) and revise. However, if the matter under consideration is doctrinal, then only a Biblical answer can be found and compromise is totally out of place.

We need the idea of “groupthink” rather than “I think.” Groupthink will produce the best plan of action. All Biblical leaders acted in God’s interest to accomplish His will. We must do the same. The old adage “my way or the highway” will not be in God’s interest nor is it the group acting together. I have seen leaders act simply to accomplish their will no matter who or what stands in their way. This behavior always leads to bitterness and division.

Each of us knows from our work experience (unless self-employed) that administrators come in all sizes and shapes. The ideal administrator is yet to be found; it is the one you did not have but wished you did. Elderships are not any different. The qualifications laid down by the Holy Spirit through the apostles should be as close to ideal as can be hoped for. When these qualifications are met it is much more likely the elders will be able to find a way to work together in unity and harmony to lead God’s people in doing His work.

It is vital for the elders to learn to cooperate with one another, and it is important for the elders to work well with the congregation. The unity of mind of these individuals should guide the congregation to our heavenly goals through the means of their collective wisdom. The unity of mind spoken of here is between the elders and the congregation. The elders came out of the congregation and therefore should know the flock. The unity of purpose for both groups (elders and members) should be to do the will of God (Mt 7:21). If there is a conflict of purpose or not any means to achieve this purpose then both may be doomed to failure.

Leadership always implies “follow-ship.” Follow-ship is, in some sense, fellowship. Fellowship has the meaning of sharing in common. Both the congregation and the elders should want the truth, proclaim the truth and if necessary be willing to die for the truth. If, both parties are not dedicated to these goals, then the eldership has an edification problem of immense proportions.

Paul admonished the congregation in Thessalonica (now called Salonica) in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 to recognize those who were over them in the Lord. Those leaders were laboring in their behalf and the congregation was to hold them in high esteem and encourage them for the work they did. However, the congregation was told to work as well. A congregation must warn those who are unruly, encourage or comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, and show patience to all. You can see from Paul’s writings, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, the joint role of the eldership and the congregation. When both are working together we have a unity of fellowship. If that unity does not exist then you as elders need to be reminded of Hebrews 5:12-14. Congregations need to be provoked, prodded, and encouraged to grow in their ability to work for the Lord. An eldership should not want a congregation of lambs to remain as lambs. Rather these shepherds want to see the lambs grow into sheep. Shepherds must nurture them to maturity through the Word.

The ability of a group of men to have unity of thought as mentioned earlier takes dedication to the task at hand. As servants of the Lord we must be about His business. If the group has any self-willed individuals the task will become even greater. Self-willed men should never be appointed in the first place. Nevertheless, self-willed elders are present in many congregations and they must be dealt with. Many self-willed individuals are not multi-task oriented but will focus on one or two issues that seem to drive their every thought. They can control the meeting if the other men are not capable of moving the issue off the table.

Peter had this in mind in 1 Peter 5:3. The phrase “lording it over” comes from the Greek word meaning “to rule over others high handedly and autocratically.” Brother G. Woods states in his commentary on this verse, it suggests that someone “who is arrogant, with a domineering spirit is positively forbidden to the eldership”. If one man strive to “lord it over the flock” in an eldership of several men (three or more) this person should be marginalized on his issues. If only two elders exist this becomes a larger problem. In this case, if the other elder cannot control the offending elder first by direct constructive conversations on the matters the offended elder should resign which will force the offending elder to resign and the congregation can begin the process of selection over again.

Peter mentions the phrase “charge allotted” to the eldership. The charge is to tend the flock; not stir it up and lead to divisions. Sometimes qualified men are placed in leadership roles and time and circumstances change their positions on matters of truth. If an elder recommends, defends and is adamant about an unscriptural change-taking place, he should resign or the congregation should request his resignation.

Peter further states that elders are to serve as examples to the flock. The word “example” comes from the Greek word *tupos*, meaning a print or mark left from an impression. That impression was left by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and stated by the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

When Peter spoke of the danger of “lording it over the flock” he was referring to the abuse of authority not the use of authority. Anyone in opposition to a scriptural decision made by the eldership may want to use this verse as proof of the elders “lording” it over the congregation. Thus it is very important for the congregation to be mature enough to recognize the difference.

Extreme positions may be found in many congregations. In science we like to talk about a “bell shaped curve”. The sound members in the congregation who are mature should be able to resist the extremes on the fringes of the bell curve. When the extremes outnumber the mature you will not any longer have the bell shaped curve and the congregation will split. It is not wrong for the truth to separate from error. Truth plus error does not, will not, and never will equal purity. The denominations of men exist because some truth has been mixed in with error. If the Lord’s church begins to mix truth

and error, what will it become? It too will become simply another denomination. To remain distinctive, unique, and authentic we must hold fast to the truth. A crown that does not fade away will be the reward for the elders and the members who hold fast to the truth. Hold fast to the truth means avoiding extreme positions that conflict with God's Word.

An example of immaturity and arrogance taken to an extreme is found in 3 John 9. Diotrephes received a letter from the apostle John. In order to show his preeminence he either destroyed the letter or failed to act on John's request. Diotrephes did not recognize John's authority nor did he receive the missionaries sent by John. So John writes the righteous Gaius, a member of the congregation, and encourages Gaius to continue doing the right thing despite Diotrephes. Brother Woods gave a list of things that Diotrephes was guilty of doing. 1) He falsely accused others, 2) He refused to receive faithful brethren, 3) He forbade other members to receive faithful brethren, 4) He expelled members who did not do his will. These attitudes and actions must never be seen among those who serve in the eldership.

An elder has no authority to direct, overlook, require or command anyone or a group to do that which is contrary to the Word of God. How many witnesses do you need to remove an elder who is requiring such evil?

If a congregation continues to listen to an unrighteous elder their souls will be lost. Jesus does not require any Christian to do that which is evil. A congregation well grounded in knowledge can recognize and reject error. That is one of the vital reasons Christians must continue to study, mature, and grow (Heb 5:13-14). Elders, remember you are God's servants and servants do not have the spirit of Diotrephes.

As elders we are to administer God's will. The word "administer" means "to manage, to bring into operation, to make application of and to maintain UNITY". A good eldership will work hard to think together as a group with a unity of purpose guided by the WORD. We are to administer what His Son taught and the apostles put into action. The Gospel has been given to earthen vessels. We are the vessels. Paul told Timothy to preach the Word. He had emphasized this point. We as elders are to administer the distribution of that Word to the lost and, in so doing, we must see that it maintains its purity. We must foster all scriptural means to sow the seed to the lost. We do this best in our local congregations over which we have the oversight. We can sponsor or support sound evangelistic efforts, locally, nationally or internationally while always keeping in mind evangelism is the primary function of the church.

The seed is the Word of God (Lk 8:11) which, when planted in the hearts of good men, will produce tremendous fruit. We have the seed so let us be in the business of seed dispersal. All seed bearing plants that God ever designed have a dispersal mechanism. Seed germination is dependent on its removal from the container and its being planted in the fertile soil of men's minds. We sow and God gives the increase (1 Cor

3:6). Since the seed is the Word then speaking is the mechanism of dispersal for the Gospel. The Bible says it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to spread His message. 1 Corinthians 1:21 says, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

Remember what God asked Moses from the burning bush, "Who made man's mouth" (Ex 4:11)? God made men's mouths. Therefore our mouths are capable of spreading the Word to call all men to Christ. This is what you as an elder are to administer.

The operation of this administrative duty will occur in the local congregation over which you have the oversight. The pulpit and the classroom are the tools you have to foster God's plan. The eldership must listen to, suggest items and support sound preaching. An eldership should review all curricula material taught in a class. The eldership must be alert to those who are selected to fill the pulpit on occasions. They must stress at all teachers' meetings the necessity of sound doctrine. A teacher who goes off in his/her own direction should be dismissed from the classroom out of loving concern for the students. Be cautious as sometimes the teacher or evangelist may need to refresh or upgrade their knowledge. Teaching and preaching are not always flaw free zones. Mistakes due to carelessness, lack of knowledge and underdeveloped skills will occur. Let me give you an example to show what I mean. A young deacon tried his hand at preaching and in so doing used a reference from some material he had seen and thought it conveyed the right idea. The source was from a denominational writer, and the thoughts conveyed were not scriptural. After the sermon the person was talked to privately, he realized his error and apologized. The following Sunday a sermon was preached to correct the error. This deacon learned a powerful lesson and because of his wonderful attitude he grew more mature in rightly dividing the Word.

When do elders administer to the dispersal of the seed? Or better yet, we might ask, "When is it not appropriate to correct error, immaturity or a slip of the tongue"? Well, the obvious answer is that refuting error and upholding the truth is never wrong. From my observation error never takes a vacation. It is sad that some vessels to whom the truth was entrusted are either on, occasionally on, more often than not on vacation, or apparently always on vacation. Predators (wolves) never announce their presence before destroying the flock. Satan, like a roaring lion, is always on the prowl. For this reason elders must always be on alert. If you expected vacation days to be accrued to you for longevity of service, sorry it is not in the "policy or contract". God was wise when He designated a plurality of elders. Therefore someone is on watch always!

The "how" of administering God's Word can best be defined in three words; "preach," "teach" and "give." The elders and the congregation must be about the work of preaching the truth, teaching the truth, giving of your means to support the truth, and praying without ceasing with joy in your hearts for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus

Christ. If you are an elder in a congregation that is focused on evangelism in this fashion, then you are as close to heaven as it will get on this earth.

The knowledge and wisdom needed to effectively evangelize are gained through a love of, and study of, the Word of God. Psalm 1 is a rich reminder of this fact. Here the psalmist speaks about those whose "...delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." How would it feel to be in a congregation in which this psalm accurately describes the elders and the members? This is why the psalmist starts the verse with the word "blessed" (can be translated "happy"). What a wonderful and joyous situation we have when a congregation is filled with those whose delight is in the law of the Lord!

Some years ago one of our members was eager to do some preaching. He was invited to preach in a local congregation for the absent minister. When he arrived and introduced himself to one of the elders, the elder made it clear that he was not to preach a long sermon. This elder was not joking! The young man spoke to me later about the situation. My reply to him was, "The leadership there does not appear to be hungry for the Word" (Mt 5:6). They were happy and delighted by less rather than more. The Lord does not own nor use a watch. The young man refused to go back to that congregation when asked again.

Elders should realize that God's Word is sacred, pure and life giving. Dilution is not an option. Ivory soap advertises itself as 99.44% pure. Yet with .56% impurities it is still not really pure. What if we placed on our bulletin covers, "We are the church of Christ with 99.44% pure Gospel truth"? My question to that congregation would be what part or parts have you left out? 1 Peter 2:2 implies that you will not grow using impure milk. God likes, desires and demands purity. He is the architect of the earth and heavens. His earth started out pure but was later corrupted by sin. The importance of purity to God is strongly emphasized in the book of Revelation (Rev 15:6; 21:18,21; 22:1). Vine's defines the word "pure" as "clean, clear or that related to pure". The dictionary has the definition, "free from anything of different, inferior or contaminating kind". In the light of these definitions do you want a nearly pure Gospel or a certified pure Gospel? We must desire 100% purity in all that we preach and practice as elders, deacons, evangelists and other members. However, when there is sin let us remember the Holy Spirit's message given through John in 1 John 1:8. In 1 John 2:1 John wrote, "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Steadfastness is a quality to be desired by all (1 Cor 15:58). Note in this verse Paul says your labor in steadfastness will not be in vain. This is your main duty so that what follows will be pleasing and acceptable to God. Steadfastness in the maintenance of pure doctrine will lie directly in the path of error. You will confront it and turn it back or it will roll over you and the flock.

Jesus warned the church at Philadelphia that He had the key of David to open and close the door (Rev 3:7). The only entry into the flock is by the means of the pure Gospel. When you start or allow additions to and subtractions from the Gospel, you have assumed an authority given only to Christ. This is not an action to be taken lightly. Paul referred to error-bearing beasts as wolves. Wolves are hungry, cunning and willing to devour the flock if you allow them to do so. You and the flock become their prey. A sure way to have wolves baying outside your congregation is to fail to edify the flock.

John tells us to try the spirits in 1 John 4:1. We try the spirits of men by testing the words they speak. If the sound is strange and you do not readily recall appropriate scripture then study to show yourself approved. After studying judge if the words spoken are true or false. Only condemn something after prayer, counsel and study. This is the testing process you must go through. If the uncertain sound is truly error then it should be condemned and the person must be informed of your study. The flock should be warned if they have heard or read these statements. Recognition of the enemy is the first step in their destruction. Remember this is a joint fellowship: elders and members. Elders must work to defend the members from error, and congregations must respond appropriately to any warnings given by the elders.

Any issue should, if possible, be discussed with its source before going to the congregation. Sometimes a mistake can be made unintentionally. You should try to separate the issue from the person. Condemn the issue but try to edify the brother or sister who has taught the error. I have found this to be the most difficult as an issue and a person is often seen as one in the minds of men. Hence, to attack an error you have judged and condemned the person. Sometimes the person teaching the error believes your attack on the error taught is a personal attack against him. In this case the person and the error have merged. Always refute error, and always do so with the right attitude (Eph 4:15; 5:11).

We have enough coverage in some brotherhood publications in which brothers battle each other and the church. While we must identify error and its proponents, we must never mark anyone without diligent study. The Lord gave a means to rectify personal problems in Matthew 18:15-17. This method can also be used in the local congregation for those who have offended by teaching error. Use this method and you will find it does bring results in both church and secular problems. My observation has been that many brotherhood problems are heavily broadcast through gossip by people who have never gone to the source, and do not know the facts. As an elder you must be silent and keep confident issues until they have been properly resolved. We are like the news media; everyone enjoys a good scandal. The congregation should not be "enjoying" before a person being accused has an opportunity to repent. Never before the first and second efforts have been attempted to correct the problem. Then the congregation should pray for the sinning brother or sister to repent. Teaching the truth and refuting error does not give us the right to be bitter and mean in so doing.

Congregational needs are a demanding part of the service of an elder. James states in James 1:27 what pure and undefiled religion is. First, we are to visit the widows and orphans who are troubled. If you will recall this was one of the first problems to face the church in Acts 6. Did you note the problem was neglect? If I read properly the neglect must have been a lack of a visiting. The word "visit" implies "to care for and exercise oversight". If it happened in the first century then it can and does happen today. Paul defines what a widow really is in 1 Timothy 5:3ff. The congregation needs to be aware of what constitutes a widow in need so as to avoid confusion and expectations on the part of the elders and members when the need arises.

Illness was not unique to the first century but is, and will always be, a congregational concern. An elder must be aware and concerned about those who are ill and shut-in. The spiritual and physical needs both require an elder's attention. In our society health insurance and hospital services have relieved the congregation of many obligations and problems, but not all. Visitation, prayer and even financial assistance may be needed. A good shepherd will aid his sick flock.

Orphans will require our help. The "how" of this help has split congregations over in-home care or institutionalized assistance. The Lord does not specify how help is to be awarded. If a good Christian family wants to care for or adopt a child or children into their home this is acceptable. If homes in the congregation are not available then institutional care could be the answer. When brothers draw a line in the sand and say it must be done this way and this way only, that is contrary to good sense and Biblical teaching. I was privileged to serve on a child-care board for some years. We had foster children in our home and other members did as well. However, some children were best cared for in many of our fine group homes. The child-care agency had many problems providing Christian homes for teen-agers. Most of these were well cared for in the group homes. The Lord said to care for them, but He did not tell us how.

The need for those outside the congregation and the church at large is a growing problem at present with a bad economy and unemployment. The real challenge is to separate real needs from false needs. An eldership will have to deal with both. I would like to say the ability to differentiate can be easily determined but it is not. You will not always be correct and sometimes you will be scammed. Just remember you did the best you could with available information and time.

Personal interviews are a requirement in dealing with those who are requesting benevolence. Get their past history, reason for their plight, church attendance (if any), names of any people in the local area they may know, and their identification. This information should be placed on a form and kept for future reference. Calls or questions to members may be made if time is available. You will have "circuit riders" as I call them who make a circuit among area congregations and denominations. Records will help you identify them. Your budget will usually dictate the amount of help you can

give. A general rule is never give cash. We have coupons for food only with a local grocer and a service station is nearby to fill up gas tanks.

Some in the brotherhood believe that we cannot use money from the church treasury to help those who are outside the church. However, the contribution in the first century was used to help the Christians and all men (2 Cor 9:13). When you find an exclusion in this passage to the word "all" let me know. It will be impossible for a local congregation to supply the entire financial needs of a small community much less an urban area, but as we have opportunity and ability let us make an effort to help those who are in need. We have received request in person or by phone for monetary assistance because they had been told from a few we had helped in the past. A good rule of thumb; the first and second priority of the church is to preach the Word and edify your members. Helping a person physically to reach them spiritually is a worthy example that has many references in the Bible. However, Jesus did not send out the twelve or the seventy to assist the community projects in Judah but to teach the Word to the lost. A good question to study is, what is Biblical poverty? Is self-induced poverty more worthy than poverty caused by unemployment, illness, accident or death?

Let us close out this lesson with a reading of the 23rd Psalm. We fully understand this is a reference to the Lord as our Shepherd, but surely the local shepherds can learn from His great example.

LESSON 3 – QUESTIONS

1. What is the major difference from textbook definitions of leadership and church leadership?
2. What is “group think”?
3. What are the three divine institutions requiring leadership?
4. In the mind of our Lord is an eldership an option or a command?
5. The first step in developing an eldership is training. How is Hebrews 5:13-14 applicable to this statement?
6. What are the three major functions of the church?
7. Does the spirit of unity in the Godhead apply to the spirit of unity in the eldership?

If not, why not?
8. Does an elder in congregation A have authority over members in congregation B?

What does “local autonomy” mean?
9. What doctrine can an elder legislate?
10. When will arrogance reveal itself?
11. How does “followship” relate to fellowship?
12. Define “lording it over the flock” as in 1 Peter 5:3.
13. How does “hold steadfast to the gospel once delivered” compare with “all truth is relative”?

14. Since an elder has authority over the congregation he has a right to change things as he sees fit. True or False

15. Where do the changes in the congregation arise from?

16. Who has the authority to stop unscriptural changes in the congregation?

17. What is man's method of word dispersal?

How does this relate to Exodus 4:11?

Correspond this to Exodus 4:12 and Matthew 28:19.

18. Knowledge and wisdom are obtained by what methods?

How does this relate to Psalm 1?

19. How can one "try the spirits" without knowledge? (1 Jn 4:1)

20. How should an elder react to mistakes made in the pulpit or classroom?

21. All poverty is the same and has the same origins. Is this a true statement?

22. How does home care (your home) differ from institutional care (group home) as applied to orphans?

THE ELDERSHIP

Lesson 4: Authority

If you are going to be an elder be prepared to receive criticism. The eldership will be criticized for the way they administer God's divine plan. Sometimes that criticism is constructive and helpful, but at other times it is negative and bitter. Those who agree with your plans for the church will praise you. However, those who disagree will be vocal in their opposition to the plans. If you don't want to be opposed, then do not become an elder. Before an eldership submits a plan to the congregation they should be convinced this plan is best for the congregation in light of the budget and talent because they must be capable of defending its approach. This vetting process may expose some flaws in the plans, and if no doctrinal matters are compromised then the elders should be willing to alter their plans.

As the time of Jesus' death approached the opposition to Him from His enemies intensified. On one occasion the chief priests and elders of the people confronted Jesus and asked Him, "By what authority are You doing these things?" (Mt 21:23). The question itself is not a bad question. Unfortunately it was asked insincerely on this occasion by those who hated Christ. In a similar fashion the eldership may at times find its authority being questioned. Perhaps the question "By what authority do you do this?" will be asked by those who want to limit the authority of the eldership. They may be the same individuals who accuse the elders of "lording" it over the flock.

They may accuse the elders of "lording" it over the flock in an attempt to diminish the authority of the eldership. Unfortunately such a rebellious group is growing within the church, as a distaste for authority looms larger within society. Why the rebellious in heart expect to be rewarded later is beyond my expertise. Often the challengers to the authority of the elders are the type whom the Lord would spew out of his mouth. Perhaps they need to read Revelation 3:15-16. Questioning the authority of the elders is one of the many challenges of leadership in the church today. Applying the question "By what authority do you do these things?" will be the theme of this, our fourth lesson in the series on the eldership.

"By what authority" is a phrase that echoes from the past and resonates in our time. Why? The vast majority of people do not want to be told what to do. This is why many people do not like their work, the armed services or even their marriages. The problem is based in self. A song we often sing here at the congregation is "None of Self and All of Thee". The song begins with the author (McGranahan) claiming, "all of self and none of thee." The transition of the author by the transforming power of the Gospel (Rom 12:1-2) changes his mind in the last verse. The apathetic have never transitioned to this stage of transformation because they conform to the spirit of an anti-authority society.

In the biological process of metamorphosis, the Greek word for “transform,” the larva of the butterfly will remain in a feeding stage due to a secretion of the Juvenal hormone. When this hormone ceases the larva will metamorphose into the next stage. The lack of respect for authority in the material world acts as the Juvenal hormone on the lives of many members. They will not metamorphose into stronger, more mature Christians because of their rebellious spirits.

Some years ago a woman wanted to place membership at the congregation. In talking to her non-Christian husband, he informed me he disliked all religions which tried to tell him what to do. I told him he needed to read the words of the song “All of Self, and None of Thee”, and then informed him it was the nature of all religions, including the church, to transform its members.

Authority is either bestowed or taken by power. God has bestowed all Biblical authority to His Son (Mt 28:18). His Son in turn gave authority to the apostles (Lk 9:1; 2 Cor 13:10; Acts 14:23). God, His Son, the Holy Spirit, and the apostles have bestowed authority to elders. The eldership has been given authority over the congregations in which they work (1 Pet 5:2). All these Scriptures reveal the concept of bestowed authority. A Biblical eldership is not one that takes authority by power, but rather is one in which that authority has been bestowed upon them by God.

The history of mankind is filled with the struggles to achieve power and authority over people. The old adage “might makes right” should never be found in the church, though this often occurs in congregations which do not have elders. Recently I was asked by a congregation to talk about eldership selection at their congregation’s men’s study group. After listening to the discussion for some while I informed them they already had men acting like “elders”. How did I draw this conclusion? In deciding a non-scriptural matter the majority of the men voted one way, but two men voted against the rest. They were still discussing this issue and had been for some weeks. My conclusion was the two (not knowing who they were) opposing the issue were already behaving as elders for they had overruled the majority. These two men had taken control of the issue and the others had allowed it to happen. The authoritative position of the eldership had not been bestowed upon these men. They simply took it by the force of their dominant personalities.

“Authority” is defined by Vine as “the right to exercise power” (Mt 9:6 ; Mt 21:23-24). The dictionary gives the following definition: “the power, or right delegated, given or authorized”. The right to act in authority is derived by delegation from one who has the power to do so. Paul and Barnabas did not just decide to appoint elders in Acts 14:23 on their own. They had the right to do so just as Paul delegated to Timothy and Titus this important function. Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit put forth the qualifications that Timothy and Titus had to abide by.

We find in Revelation 4:4 elders in heaven. The One who sits on the throne bestowed their authority upon them. Their responsibilities are regulated and controlled by He who sits upon the throne, and He also regulates the activities of the earthly elders through His revealed Word.

Let's look now at a few scriptural references relating to authority. First, Acts 20:28 relates the words of Luke who had observed and recorded the events there as directed by the Holy Spirit. In this verse Luke records two words that relate to the eldership. These words are "overseers" and "shepherds". These men who gathered there were brothers in Christ, friends and fellow laborers. Paul states that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers and shepherds. Did you ever think of the eldership in terms of a position endorsed by the Holy Spirit? Elders are close to God in that they have fulfilled the qualifications given by the Holy Spirit and they stand between God and the flock. How much closer to God can you be than having fulfilled the qualifications given by the Christ? If this does not produce humility, what will?

Would the Holy Spirit separate men out for service as elders and not give them any authority? Paul knew that they had the authority and responsibility to guide, direct, shelter and feed the Lord's sheep. Do not let men rob you of this great blessing of servanthood. We defined earlier the nature of an overseer. You do have the authority to oversee the flock and rule on matters of expediency (which we will cover later). Paul told them he had done what he could; now it is their responsibility to maintain purity and keep the peace in righteousness. When your life reflects the qualifications laid down, you will have joy in your blessing and move the church forward. Do not give up to men what the Holy Spirit has given you unless physical or mental illness prevents you from proceeding.

As Paul said goodbye to the elders from Ephesus the scene on that beach that day must have been an awe-inspiring event. Those men were kneeling in prayer and grieving the departing of their beloved Paul. The wind and waves that swept the beach on that day have been dissolved by time, but the love and concern still lives within our hearts. Shakespeare had stated that "... parting is such sweet sorrow" and here is the image of it. A group kneeling in close embraces pouring out their hearts to God for consolation and direction is a message heard even today.

A second verse which emphasizes the authority of the elders is 1 Peter 5:2. In this text the word "overseer" appears again. Brother Guy N. Woods in his commentary on this verse uses the word "superintendent". If any of you have taught in the public or private schools you know, without defining the word, that the office of superintendent has authority to direct the affairs of the school. In our case the elders have the authority within the congregation to direct the congregation. Brother Woods further states, "To fail to do so is to be remiss in duty and recreant to the trust imposed." He also adds, "... for the congregation to refuse to recognize this oversight when properly exercised by duly qualified and appointed elders is to be in rebellion against God Himself."

A third verse to consider in our discussion of the authority of elders is Hebrews 13:17. This verse shows the needed unity between the congregation and the eldership. It is an exhortation for both parties to remain faithful. The congregation is told three things: obey, submit and be profitable. The elders are told to watch, to be able to give an account and do so in joy. In verse 7 of Hebrew's chapter 13 the Hebrew writer had admonished the elders to rule, speak the truth and be faithful examples. How can an eldership be held responsible for the souls within a congregation if they are not given any authority? Too many elders focus too much on budget matters. While such mundane matters must be addressed, the primary focus of the eldership is safeguarding the flock. Soul saving has first priority in matters of the budget. The miserly always quote this verse when the cost of good works is discussed. They reply, "I will not support this due to our budget restraints and my accountability." To whom is he accountable the banker or to God?

Brother Max Patterson has this statement in his syllabus on Hebrews; "Many elderships will be lost because they acted as a board of directors, and not as those who watched for the spiritual welfare of the souls of men." Although your appointment was Holy Spirit approved do not put your crown on just yet. All authority must be accompanied with humility. This cannot be overly stressed, otherwise an elder may "lord it over the flock." Authority gives the right to make decisions but humility gives you the common sense to use it wisely and not with arrogance or malice.

I have seen situations when a new elder is appointed and his zeal is on a high plane. Others will then remark in his presence, "Your zeal will cool with time." The problem was their zeal had cooled and they wanted to infect others with their affliction.

Another means to dampen effectiveness is to say, "We tried that before and it did not work." Sometimes this may be valid but times, events and neighborhoods change. Why is it that some have more impediments to forward motion than suggestions to move forward? Do not dwell in the past. Move to the now and the future.

Authority bestowed on the eldership has its limitations. The two major areas of decision-making will be either doctrinal or expedient matters. A doctrinal issue is one Biblically defined by command, inference or example. These items are totally out of bounds for the eldership to change, alter, dismiss or overlook. However, defense will be an ever-constant vigil because challenges will come on a continuous basis.

The word "doctrine" comes from the Greek words: *didache* or *didaskalia*. The former is used twice in the Pastoral Epistles, once in 2 Timothy 4:2 and the other in Titus 1:9 (Vine). Both refer to teaching and what is taught. Vine defines *didache* as teaching and the authority to do so. He defines *didaskalia* as the act of teaching. In a sense the words cover content and method. Methods may vary with time and place but the content must be the same in order to remain pure from generation to generation. If

an eldership allows, permits, condones or gives Godspeed to false content they have digressed. The digression which you permitted may result not only in the loss of your soul but the unnumbered in the future who will hear and respond to the error started under your tutelage. Will this response bring salvation to their souls? Remember where it started and stop it then and now. The Lord gave you the authority to do so. Have some backbone and use it!

The word “expedient” is from a Greek word *sumphero*, meaning “to bring together, to be an advantage or profitable”. The word is used in Acts 19:19 and describes the burning of books containing false teachings. This was indeed profitable!

The issues under expediency will bring the congregation together and provide a more enriching climate for fellowship. The eldership can be creative, innovative and imaginative in matters of expediency. However, caution must be given not to let things get out of hand or become disorderly.

Doctrinal issues can and do produce division, so also can those of an expedient nature. One example is setting the time of study or worship. You cannot read from Acts 20:7 what time of day the congregation came together to break bread. We can glean from this verse that a time was set and was known to all who would come. You may change the time on the first day of the week, but you cannot change the day. One is expedient and the other is doctrinal.

Doctrinal issues have three broad divisions:

1. Direct Command: Matthew 28:19-20
2. Examples: Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2
3. Inference: Acts 20:7; “the first day of the week” infers that each first day was utilized for worship.

As elders we cannot legislate doctrine. James 4:12 reveals that we have only one Law-giver, and that is Jesus Christ. Daring and innovative doctrinal changes cannot be made. I have often wondered what an eldership was thinking (or maybe not thinking) when I read of a congregation using the instruments of music, women song leaders or even women elders? My first question to myself is, “By what authority do they have to initiate such actions?”.

Hebrews 13:7 and 17 deserve more insight than previously given. Both of these verses are rich in admonition and exhortation. The letter of Hebrews was written to a persecuted church. These fellow Christians had previously faced persecutions, were currently faced with persecution, and would face more in the future. Tribulations will bring about the best or worst in an eldership. We can observe from the book of He-

brews that the congregation or congregations had a streak of unbelief (Heb 3:19), immaturity (Heb 5:12ff), poor attendance (Heb 10:25), and forgotten exhortations (Heb 12:5). These brethren needed to straighten up and focus on the truth (Heb 12:12-16; 25-29). Who will do these things or see that the congregation has been supplied with the necessary strength and knowledge to resist the devil and his disciples? The writer of Hebrews told them to be bold, remember the elders and obey the elders (Heb 13:6,7,17).

The readers of Hebrews were told to “remember”. Remembrance is a mechanism to recall your past experiences. These readers were told that the eldership ruled over them and not some faction within or without the congregation. These people had spoken in the past from the Word of God. Once the truth has been spoken to an audience whose responsibility does it become to obey the truth? The elders had done their duty and were not responsible for the slackness in the congregation. Our responsibility as Christians is to speak the word, live in obedience and pray always. The hearer is the one responsible to heed and obey or suffer the consequences of rejection.

The elders had shown the proper faith. They had demonstrated the leadership necessary for an example to the flock. If your conduct has been proper then the response of the observer is to emulate or disregard. The word “conduct” implies proper behavior. This behavior would mean they had acted with proper deportment in the appropriate direction and had executed their duties in a manner exemplary of the office.

In verse 17 we see the duties of the congregation. First, the word is to obey. If one should want to summarize man’s actions toward God one could do so with the word “obey”. The continuous theme from Genesis to Revelation demonstrates this with a clarification call. The lack of obedience is nothing more than the rejection of authority and open rebellion at any level.

The Holy Spirit reinforces the word “obey” with a similar and even more revealing word, “submission.” Some might argue that the need to submit to, and obey the elders is old fashioned, politically incorrect and downright humiliating. This latter word is exactly right. This word is extracted from the word humility. In 1 Peter 5:5 Peter told the Christians to submit and cover themselves with the mantle of humility. Peter commanded this having authority first as an apostle and secondly as an elder (1 Pet 5:1). Would God oppose a godly eldership or a proud and stubborn congregation? The Hebrew writer teaches us that resistance to the authority of the elders is “unprofitable.” (Heb 13:17) Resistance on earth will only bring submission, rejection and departure in heaven.

Hebrews 13:17 does not only say something important about how the Christians are to submit to the elders, but it also tells us something about the elders responsibility. The elders will give an account for the manner in which they have watched out for the souls of the Christians in the congregation. Is the context here talking about the budget

or the jeopardy of souls? The answer is obvious to those who hear and who want to understand. The focus of the eldership must be on souls.

Clearly God has given the eldership authority. What we have among those who wish to deny the authority of the elders is a rebellious spirit. They are not really listening to the Word of God. Perhaps this is why the Lord in Revelation 2 and 3 repeats the phrase "He who has an ear ..." seven times. The word "hear" (or related forms) occurs 537 times in the Bible. It was first used in Genesis 4:23: "... hear my voice" and last used in Revelation 13:9: "If anyone has an ear, let him hear." God knows we have ears. We, on the other hand, fail to use them. Over thousands of years God gave 526 commands to hear Him. It would be humorous, if not so sad, to see that after 526 commands to hear, God finally asks people if they have ears!

The church is an authority based institution, planned by God, established by Jesus, and instituted by the authority given to the apostles on Pentecost. Authority permeates down to the flock whose desire should be for elders to rule over them, with deacons assisting the elders by serving in various capacities. Christ had the authority to establish His church (Mt 16:18). He saw fit to place elders over these earthly congregations first in Acts 14:23. We must honor His desire and His plan.

Some critics of the eldership's authority have argued that the Greek word for authority, *exousia*, is not used in relation to the eldership and, consequently, the elders have no authority. However, the Greek word for "rule" is applied to the eldership in 1 Timothy 5:17-18. Paul wrote, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." How does one rule without authority? The word again occurs in 1 Timothy 3:4-5 within the qualifications for the eldership. In this instance the word is applied to the home. If the man must rule well his own house in order to be qualified, does this not infer that he will be ruling when becoming an elder?

The Greek word, *hegeomai*, meaning "to lead", is translated "to rule" in Hebrews 13:7,17 and 24. Note in verse 24 the Hebrew writer differentiates the membership into categories; first those who rule, and secondly the other saints. All are saints, but some of the saints are set apart to rule over the flock at that location.

Those who challenge the authority of the eldership to rule the congregation, of course selected a word not associated with the eldership. Does this mean that elders have no authority? Absolutely not! Both the Bible and history show that elders in the local churches had authority over those congregations.

Robert Taylor in his book on the eldership has these remarks on this issue, "... 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 The Bible clearly teaches the absence of the Greek word, "exousia," notwithstanding that a man is to rule his own house (1 Tim 3:5) and that elders are to rule the church" (Heb 13:17), *The Elder and His Work* pages 180-181.

Brother Wayne Jackson in his book *Before I Die* on page 91 comments on the word "rule" as found in 1 Timothy 3:4. He says, "The term "rule" is a strong one. While there is authority within the word, it implies a different attitude than a raw, crack-the-whip authority. The term *proistemi* derives from *pro*, before, and *histemi*, "to place, set." It is used of supervision or management with the underlying tone of "to care for."

Brother Woods in his commentary on 1 Peter 5:2 writes this about "exercising the oversight". "The words exercising the oversight are translated from the Greek participle *episkopantes* which derived from the word *episkopos*, the word for bishop or overseer." The implied meaning here is one who has oversight. Is a person in this position only to observe without authority to act? Clearly the elders are to lead and give directions.

Some point to Jesus statement in Matthew 20:25-28 in a vain attempt to show that a person does not have the right or authority to oversee another person in the church. I agree with the context of this statement. Peter warned against lording it over the flock (1 Pet 5:3). The Greek word Peter used here is *katakuriuo* meaning "to exercise lordship over." Men serve the Lord out of love and never by means of coercive actions. If a person must be forced or bullied into acting, then he is not acting out of a true faith.

Paul admonishes the brethren at Corinth to keep the tradition just as he had delivered it to them. The word "tradition" is from the Greek word *paradosis* for which Vine gives the following definition: "apostolic teachings, traditions or instruction concerning the gatherings of believers".

The tendency to drop the old and add the new is very prevalent in the church today. Paul had warned Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:3 about "itching ears". Itching ears do not hear sound doctrine or inspired apostolic traditions, much less keep them.

God has not been pleased with those who rebel against His chosen leaders. God set forth a divine plan for the church and His Son died for it by giving His blood for our salvation (Acts 20:28). The apostles led the first century church and established the God-given pattern of worship, leadership and entry requirements. Anyone who objects to this divine plan is a rebel. The individuals who fill the office of an elder may be imperfect and, like all men, make mistakes. This should never be understood as a blemish on the plan but on those who serve in it. Some on occasions must be removed.

We read in Numbers 16 of a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. The rebels were Korah, Dathan and Abiram, along with 250 other men. Their complaint against

Moses was, “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy and you exalt yourselves over them.”

What does Moses say in reply to those sons of Levi and Reuben? “Is it a small thing you do for God, who has separated you out from the congregation, to work in the tabernacle and serve the people? God has brought you near and are you seeking the priesthood?” Moses called for the rebels to come up, but they refused, so Moses proposed a test between him and the rebels. The test was the burning of incense and its acceptance by God from Aaron or the rebels. God told Moses to separate the congregation by saying, “Depart now from the tents of the wicked men. Touch nothing of theirs lest you be consumed.”

God prepared a great pit to swallow up the wicked on that day long ago. God told the people to separate themselves from evil works lest they be destroyed as well. To their honor and respect for God they did as he commanded. The ground opened up and the rebels were early entrants to a greater pit prepared for the wicked on the Day of Judgment. What had Korah, Dathan and Abiram done wrong? They had rebelled against those authorized by God to lead. We dare not do the same today.

The word used in Numbers 16:30 is “provoke” in the KJV and in the NKJV the word “rejected” is used. The ESV uses the word “despised” the Lord. This word in the Greek is defined by Vine’s as “amiss, to make bitter”. The Hebrew word is *kaas* meaning “to provoke, vex or make angry”. This word occurs 55 times in the Old Testament. In 2 Kings 23:19 it states “... which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger...” The provoking process is a stimulus by men to cause God’s anger (response) to be kindled. Why would anyone want to provoke God to anger? Some in the church appear to do this on a daily basis! Such rebellious trouble makers are the stimuli and a stimulus always provokes a response. This is a basic principle of neurobiology.

The Hebrew word *marah* means “to rebel or to be contentious” (Vine). Moses and Aaron’s sister was named Miriam (“stubborn headed”). If you will recall she too rebelled against her brothers. Deuteronomy 9:7 is a good verse to read to show the usage of this word. A standard dictionary gives this meaning as “a person who refuses allegiance to or resists”. The only positive aspect of being a rebel is to rise in righteous anger against error, wickedness and unrighteousness.

I will close this lesson with a statement from brother Taylor’s book *The Elder and His Work* on page 175. “The very fact that elders are overseers portrays their authority. The very fact that they are charged with a duty exhibits them as ones in whom authority is invested to execute that duty, to expedite its accomplishment in harmony with truth.”

LESSON 4 – QUESTIONS

1. An elder must be a person who can take criticism. How does criticism differ from complaining?
2. How does authority differ from rule?
3. How does rebel differ from obedience?
4. What is the transforming agent in spiritual growth? (Rom 12:1-2)
5. In a songbook read carefully the words of the song “All of Self and None of Thee.” Did you do this?
6. Differentiate between “doctrine” and “expedient.”
7. What regulates the activities of earthly elders?
8. Paul states in Acts 20:30 where trouble arises from. Was this a characteristic of only the first and second centuries?
9. Does humility play a role in the work of an eldership?

In what way?
10. What is the relationship between Godly elders and the congregation they oversee? (1 Pet 5:2-3 and Heb 13:17)
11. What are elders accountable for?
12. Teaching has both content and method. Which of these is superior to the other?

What method is appropriate if you do not know your material?
13. What are the three categories of proof for doctrinal matters?
14. We as elders are also fellow legislators. True or False

Who made the law?

And who is to follow the law?

15. Compare and contrast Hebrews 13:7 with Hebrews 13:17.
16. Does remembrance play a role in being a Christian? (Rev 2:5 and Lk 22:19)
17. The Greek word for authority is *exousia* and rule is *proistemi*.

In what way are they similar?

And how do they differ? (a good Greek dictionary will help)

18. How do you as elders keep tradition and yet foster change?

Are these compatible terms?

19. Should an elder be a rebel?

Relate your answer to the God-given gospel and man-made changes.

THE ELDERSHIP

Lesson 5: Listening And Informing

Both listening and informing are important components to an elder's work. Elders must be good at both in order to be effective.

Listening is defined as "to give attention for the purpose of hearing, to heed what is said, obey or to wait for a specific sound". Notice how the word "listen" is used in Acts 4:19. Peter had listened to the Sanhedrin telling him not to preach in the name of Jesus anymore. He weighed the statement and then responded quickly and clearly. Peter got right to the point and let them know he was going to listen to God.

People are usually not very good at listening. God Himself has already informed us of this in Revelation 13:9. Modern research has shown that the retention of information given in a sermon or speech can be reduced by 90% after a short time. In order to reinforce retention rates the listener needs to take notes and review those notes periodically.

Most of my better students in both graduate and undergraduate courses were good note takers. On very rare occasions I would find someone who could retain much of what was said just by listening carefully. In such cases these people were able to focus their attention on what was said. Some learners can do this with reading such as those with "photographic memories". These people are very rare!

We all have ears but we are not all capable of using them effectively. When a problem arises your knowledge of it will come by conversation or written statement. Written information is usually much better. Relying on conversation alone can be very difficult. However, listening to a person in conversation allows you the opportunity to ask questions and to note inflexion in the person's voice.

An elder listening to a conversation should be cautious in responding to a question without clarification. We often tend to have selective hearing. In other words our mental faculties focus on key words or phrases and exclude the others. Therefore we may not have a complete understanding of what was really said.

If you look through a magnifying glass at a photo in a newspaper you will see that the picture is made by of a series of dots. If you are having a conversation with a person and you grasp only a few words it is just like seeing only a few dots in a newspaper picture. Your view of the conversation will be incomplete.

A clear image can be had when everything is brought into focus. You have seen photos (usually snapshots) made in haste. The image is not clear and we discard the

photo. This is why we should think carefully before repeating someone's conversation to another person. Why? When it gets back to the original person they may say, "That is not what I said."

What if Peter or John, as they stood before the Sanhedrin, had been whispering, joking in low tones or otherwise indicated utter disregard to what was being said in Acts 4:18? What would have been their response in Acts 4:19? Would they have known enough about what was said to give a proper response?

When there is a conversation between a member(s) and an elder(s) we need to consider three verbal behaviors - voice quality, voice clarity and speech content. Voice quality is made up of pitch, volume and rate of speech. Stress and anxiety will change one or all. Weighing the emotional state of the speaker is important in determining the manner in which you respond.

A raised voice indicates a strong feeling about their problem. A change in volume is a good indicator of the emotional state of the person speaking. An angry person will have a higher rate of speech than a calm person.¹

In these situations it is best to calm the person down in order to arrive at the precise nature of the problem. Once the person is calm, or calmer, proceed with a restatement of their concern. If a single elder is listening to this he should take notes. After the conversation he should review and revise his recorded notes. A single elder must accurately relay the concern to the other elder or elders. If the upset member will write down his (or her) concerns it will relieve you of making a correct statement of their problem. But, even with a written statement you will need to review it with the person.

When a person comes forward with a note asking for prayers you will need to find out if this is the statement they want read or not. Review the statement with them to be safe. If they do not want it to be read you will need to rehearse a statement with them. The elder should keep his remarks focused on the statement and not paraphrase, embellish or play down their sin. Read or say the rehearsed statement and have a prayer. I have observed some preachers and elders give another sermon, or give such glowing praise of the person you wonder why they came forward in the first place. Repentance is a personal affair between the sinner and God. When a public confession is necessary the elder does not need to be too graphic with the details he reveals to the congregation.

Speech content is the most important part of a verbal exchange. The content will be what your response must deal with. Gather the content by taking notes either mentally or written. I cannot stress enough the importance of taking written notes. When the person has ceased to speak, review your understanding of what was said with the person seeking a solution. Revise your written notes based on the review. Restate the

¹ Walters, Stan B., *The Truth About Lying*, Sourcebook, Inc. Naperville, Ill., 2000.

problem back to the individual for final verification. You should carry a pencil or pen with you at all times and something to write on. These items may be left at a convenient place near the front of the building just for such an occasion.

If the statement of a person is given to a single elder never give your opinion to the person. You must review the situation with the entire eldership before making a statement. Do not delay this concern for several days before a meeting can be arranged with the entire eldership. When the group has made its decision it should be relayed in writing to the concerned party. Remember to keep a copy of your statement so that you can refer back to it if the problem is not resolved.

A rejection will bring about further review. If the problem is a doctrinal issue then the collective decision of the eldership must be in accordance with Scripture and remain steadfast with your conclusion.

If the item under consideration is an expedient concern, then further review might be undertaken. However, do not draw out this back and forth negotiation. Remind the member that the conclusion was the decision made by the eldership and move on with the plan.

A situation reviewed by the entire eldership should be focused on the problem at hand. One of the elders should be the spokesperson and others should only interrupt when asked to give their point of view. If everybody speaks, the discussion will get out of hand and off subject. Confusion will reign and nobody will be edified. If any one of the elders disagrees with the majority decision of the other elders he should not say so in the presence of the one bringing the complaint. Dissention in the ranks is one of the best tools Satan ever had.

The worst of all situations is when a dissenting elder seeks out the complaining member privately and tells him of his position on the matter. This will lead to divisions, internal problems and hurt feelings.

Never, under any circumstances, take before the congregation a problem that has been resolved at the first or second level. If the eldership can maintain confidentiality the healing process will occur much sooner and harmony will be restored. The eldership does not need to be the source of the latest gossip and scandal in the congregation.

Confidence is a quality to be desired among all who serve as elders, deacons, preachers or church secretaries. Confidence is defined as "full trust, belief in the reliability of a person". The word "confidence" goes hand in hand with "trust." The Greek word is *pepoithesis* and is found in 2 Corinthians 1:15 and 3:4. The word implies trust, confidence and assurance.

One of the major problems in the brotherhood is our inability to hold in trust things told to us by other individuals. We are told to confess our sins one to another (Gal 6:2). It does not say go about and tell others. What is it about human nature that we feel “compelled” to tell someone else? A godly spouse is a blessing in this respect. A trusted friend who can keep things in confidence is hard to find.

Some years ago one of our teenage boys asked me if I would help him with a problem. I assured him I would do my best. He told me he had a Christian friend who had confessed to him a sin that he had committed. First, I did not ask him to break his trust to his friend. Secondly, I urged him to study with his friend and show him why it was a sin. Some weeks later he told me it had been resolved and his friend had repented. The heroes of this story were the young men doing what was right.

The psalmist speaks of the issue of trust and confidence in Psalm 55:12-14. The psalm is entitled *God, The Deliver of the Betrayed*. This psalm deals with the author’s betrayal by his enemies. However, in verses 12-14 he mentioned how his friends had also abused their trust. David states in verse 12, “For it is not an enemy that reproaches me.” The word “reproach” is “to slander or to abuse”. When you have confided in a friend about a concern you have, and then later learn your friend has slandered you it hurts beyond belief. It is callousness in the first degree. Have we not all sinned and come short of the glory of our Savior (Rom 3:23)? Does bringing down a friend in the eyes of others elevate your status as a servant? Those who do not practice the vice they criticize in others give the most venomous criticism.

David also says in verse 12 that the critical friend was an equal, his guide and acquaintance. He was hurt by a person he had respected and used as a guide in his life. The eldership should be looked up to for their guidance and not as a source of gossip and selected commentary on the failure of some member of the flock. How close was this person who had betrayed David? It was someone who walked with him to the house of God. These types of betrayal are a part of fiction. Shakespeare in his play *Julius Caesar* describes the death of Caesar on his arrival at the Senate. He was stabbed by several members of the Senate among whom was Brutus, a friend. Caesar speaks these dying words, “You too, Brutus!”

Remember, listening means just that, and it does not imply nor condone distribution to those not authorized to hear it. David calls this what it is in verse 15, “for wickedness is in their dwelling, in the midst of all”.

Besides being a good listener, an elder is going to have to be good at informing. Informing is defined as “to impart knowledge or information, to supply with knowledge, to persuade with resulting effect on character, to animate or inspire”. The Greek words translated “inform” are *emphanizo* which means “to manifest, exhibit or inform”, and *katecheo* “to resound (as in an echo), to teach by word of mouth, instruct or inform” (Vine).

The first Greek word is found in Acts 24:1 and Acts 25:2. The second Greek term is found in Acts 21:21,24.

Having heard the problem and verified its correctness you may need to pass it along to the rest of the eldership. The process of informing needs to be reviewed. It is the dissemination of information to another party authorized to hear and formulate a response. The resulting outcome will be to improve the character of the party or parties involved. The stages are listen, verify, inform, formulate and respond. The collective response should be as final as can be under the circumstances. If you have done a good job in your collective response then do not quibble about it after it is made public or is known to outside parties. Any other outside parties should only be those who have been informed by the complainant and not the eldership.

If the elders need to make a decision public then they must all remain united, remembering they are on an equal footing. An eldership should not divide up into factions after having heard criticisms of their decision. I have heard of some elders who will say, "That was not my position," after a decision was made and enacted. The time to voice opposition is in the private meeting when these objections can be clarified.

Elders can provide a united response to the parties involved in an issue by direct conversation or through a letter to the party. Any direct conversation should be held in private, and not in the hallway of the church building.

If the first method is selected you will need a spokesperson to relay the decision. The spokesperson should be well rehearsed in the proper manner and correct content of the reply. Never call a person back to add or delete a facet of the content presented. If all try to talk to the party it will result in confusion with deletions and additions. Most often when this happens the person who was not in agreement with the statement will voice his concerns and the lack of unity in the eldership will be made evident.

The eldership is not a body similar to the Supreme Court in which majority and minority opinions are given. Only the majority opinion should be given. If a minority opinion from a dissenting elder is presented problems will follow. When this happens it is the surest way to factionalism and division.

A written statement is superior to a vocal one. The written statement will put forth the purest form of what the eldership wants to say. If the eldership's word crafting is not what it should be, ask the minister to read and appraise your grammatical shortcomings. In matters of doctrine it is best to have the minister as an ally in your deliberations. If the minister or a teacher is the problem under discussion because they have taught a doctrine contrary to the Scripture, the eldership will have to deal with this in a different manner. If the eldership is agreed that error has been taught or is being taught the elders should select someone to go and speak with the person in a less formal set-

ting. If the error is confirmed the entire eldership will need to be informed as to the problem.

If the designated elder finds a misunderstanding, or the person repents of their teaching, then the problem has been resolved and the congregation has been spared a major disagreement and moves on. A congregation is a family of beloved brothers and sisters. When love is found in all for Christ and His church problems can be easily corrected. This resolution, however, is dependent on quick and resolute actions by the eldership.

When doctrinal matters are involved an investigation of the issues will be needed, supplemented with prayer. Advice might be sought from faithful brethren on these matters. A stand for the truth will always cause hard feelings and criticism. I think this is why our Savior gave the admonition in Matthew 5:10-12. We should never draw back from evident wrongdoing in our midst. Regardless of the circumstances we must act with firmness, determination and always with love in our hearts for the lost.

I was a deacon in a congregation in which adultery and fornication had occurred among some members. It was necessary for the eldership to react and they did. Visits, pleas and studies were undertaken before a public letter to disfellowship was read. Friends on both sides of the issue began to defend or condemn the actions taken. We called on members of both groups in an attempt to get them to see the wisdom done to correct a public sin. Some in the parties repented but others left and went to other congregations in the area. Why is it some people have the idea that if they move their membership that will resolve their sins? They are still in a state of rebellion and the other congregation, if they are aware of it, has now embraced their wickedness.

Decisions made by elders concerning items of an expedient nature can be announced to the congregation, placed in the bulletin or passed to the members by use of a phone tree or e-mails. This type of information should be disseminated as widely as possible so all the membership is aware of the change in normal protocol.

Expedient changes are often known to the membership before any final decision is made. If the eldership wants participation from the congregation it should be asked for. If the elders ask for feedback from the congregation they need to be willing to listen to the members discuss the options available to them. After a set period of time the eldership should make a decision and move forward to implement that decision.

The congregation needs to be updated from time to time on budget or missionary activity. A quarterly men's meeting is a good method to share this type of information. The eldership can select a spokesperson or rotate. An annual meeting of the congregation may be in order to inform widows and single women of the above affairs.

These meetings and data gathering processes should not be understood of absolving the eldership of their authority. "It must be clearly understood that all matters will ultimately be decided and resolved by the elders and it should also be understood that some matters will need to be considered in the next meeting of the elders, after which their decision will be made known to the church" (David Sain, *Spiritual Sword*, Vol. 41, Oct. 2009, No 1).

The processes of listening and informing are two of the major responsibilities of an eldership. In this lesson I have not covered every conceivable approach that can be made. However, these are sound methods that will bring positive results. Remember, each elder has specific talents that aid the collective wisdom of the group. A good eldership will develop these and use them to accomplish their divinely appointed functions. Just because one of the elders may be a better speaker or organizer does not mean he is head elder. We need to get over the idea that the one who speaks is the chief. The only person who does not seek wise counsel is the fool (Prov15:7).

An eldership can take some comfort in knowing that whatever may befall the congregation is not new (Eccl 1:9). Knowing that elderships have faced similar situations before should make them aware of the fact that help from others may be available. The old saying "do not reinvent the wheel" is a wise reminder of Solomon's wisdom. Forums, books and lessons can be a great reservoir of material to answer your questions. The struggle you will encounter has been conquered in the past. Knowledge of the past resolution may be of use to you. The players may be different but the scene is often the same.

Communication is a difficult process. In colleges across the nation many young people major in this discipline. Over the years many graduates have filled responsible positions throughout the nation. Yet, with all these acquired skills, we still have trouble delineating truth from spin and a downright lie. If a person is given enough paint called error they can cover the truth, raise doubt and inspire false concepts of what they just covered up.

A writer (I do not who) once used the expression, "It is just a matter of semantics." Semantics pertains to and arises from the different meanings of words or other symbols. This is a part of our communication problem. You can especially see this when you speak with those who are caught up in denominationalism. They must learn the Biblical definitions to key words and phrases before any progress can be made toward converting them. An example of this is found in the Greek word *baptizo* meaning "to immerse". We know the word and its meaning and use it accordingly. However, they do not know the meaning of the word so they teach a doctrine contrary to Scripture. If we could all read Mark 16:15 the same way many religious problems would be resolved. The devil is busy painting error over what we preach, teach and practice. Is it just a communication problem? It is religious propaganda!

About five years ago a woman approached me after services. She had been attending for a few weeks on a regular basis. She wanted to place membership at the congregation. I asked her where she had previously attended. She gave me the name of a denomination. I told her we could not accept that method of baptism as scriptural. I told her she needed to take one of our correspondence courses on the church and the form of baptism approved by the Lord for entry into His church. During the course of her study she moved to another place in the urban area. She began to attend a faithful congregation near to where she had moved. Some time passed and the church secretary received a call from that congregation informing us she had been baptized that past Sunday and wanted the congregation here to know of her decision.

God who created us knew of our most basic weakness: the ability to retain, apply and foster the truth. Take the time to study Deuteronomy 28 and you will observe our Creator trying to instill within the Israelites this basic concept. The first 14 verses deal with the blessings of obedience and the next 54 verses concern some type of warning. People are more likely to go astray than follow the light. Is this not what Matthew 7:13-14 teaches? As shepherds we need to realize "going astray" is a fundamental feature of sheep. Sheep left unattended will always do so.

A company president told his sales staff, "We have a good product. Your function is to convince everyone else that it is the greatest on the market". We have a great product, the only formula available for salvation, Romans 1:16. Our job is to communicate that to everyone else. So keep listening, informing and praying and you will one day hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mt 25:21).

LESSON 5 – QUESTIONS

1. How does “hearing” differ from “listening”?
2. Explain Revelation 13:9.
3. How can taking notes aid in communication?
4. Does Peter’s reply in Acts 4:19-20 indicate he was listening to what was said in Acts 4:18?
5. What are the three verbal behaviors in a discussion?
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)
6. Why is it best to rehearse a note with the repentant before reading it to the congregations?
7. Should an elder rehearse their notes with the person giving a complaint before going to the eldership?

Why?
8. When sins are confessed to an elder or elders the next step is to tell the congregation all the details. True or false
9. David in Psalm 55 states someone had reproached him. Was he a friend or an enemy?
10. How can elders betray their trust to the congregation?
11. What are the stages in listening and informing?

12. When elders give reports to the congregation, should both the majority and minority opinions be given?

Why or why not?

13. Why is a spokesperson better than having the whole eldership give their opinions?

14. What comfort can be found in Ecclesiastes 1:9?

15. Define “semantics”.

How does it play out with a word like “baptism”?

THE ELDERSHIP

Lesson 6: Installation And Removal Of Elders

The Scriptures do not reveal a procedure for placing a person in the position of an elder. In Acts 14:23 the verse states, "So when they had appointed elders in every church" The word "appointed" is from the Greek word *cheirotoneo* "to stretch forth the hands". *Cheir* "the hand" and *teino* "to stretch" are the words combined here. In Titus 1:5 the word is *kathistemi* "to make or to set a person to a place of authority". The same word appears in Acts 6:3. Titus was to appoint elders in every city of Crete. This was not an ecclesiastical ceremony but recognition by the congregations of those who had been qualified by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit qualified these men by delivering the specifications set forth in Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The Holy Spirit laid out the qualities God desired in the men who were to be shepherds over His flock. The qualities are such that their presence in the lives of these men is evident and observable to those who are capable of discernment. The word "recognize" means "to identify from knowledge of appearance or character, to perceive as existing or true, realize and acknowledge and accept formally". If a person has the ability to recognize a man of good character, then he should be capable of recognizing someone who has the ability to serve. If not, then the congregation has fallen under the conditions described in Hebrews 5:14.

The preparation for the selection and appointment of elders in a congregation must begin early. A congregation with existing elders should be training their youth and their deacons to serve as shepherds. The training classes need to be taught by the elders and minister. If you wait until the need arises for new elders there is a danger poor decisions will be made by brethren who are acting in haste.

A person should not desire what he does not understand. Elders need to help young men understand the importance of preparing for that role from the time they are young. An eldership's contact with their teens should extend beyond any training classes. Interest shown by the elders will develop and foster interest and desire in the teens to serve. An elder should talk to the teens and participate when possible in their events both in and outside the congregation. Elders need to be able to encourage all age groups of Christians.

When a congregation decides to establish an eldership, or to add to an existing one, educating the congregation about the qualifications will be a necessity. In a congregation without elders the minister or outside speakers should review the qualifications laid down in Timothy and Titus. Good books and articles are available. Articles (with permission) may be copied and distributed to the congregation. A Bible class might spend a quarter reviewing the qualifications. Everyone needs a proper understanding of what is taking place and how they are to participate.

When I taught Microbiology I required my students to identify various microbial species as a part of their lab work. Students must know how, and what to look for in their investigation or the results will be chaotic. On one occasion I was observing a student working on her identification project when I asked her if she knew what she had. She gave me the name of an organism primarily based on observation alone without much comparative study. I then asked her if the microbe she was investigating had all the characteristics of that species. She said no. If it does not fit the characteristics then it must not be the organism. About a week later this student came to me with her report. I looked at her identification and asked if it fit the characteristics of that organism? She replied in the affirmative. I asked her if she was willing to stake her grade on the identification and, again, she said yes. This time she was correct because it met all the qualifications of that organism and it was the one she had selected from the assigned pool. The same rules apply to the elder selection process. When a person has met the qualifications laid down by the Holy Spirit then you have a match and an elder.

The selection process is similar to the identification process just described. You have pool of men to select from and the qualifications demanded by Scripture. The next step is to apply the qualifications to the men available for selection.

The congregation will be asked for names from their midst to be given to the elders or minister. The congregation should have a period of time for reflection and study. When you have decided on names you think are qualified you should ask them if they desire the office and are willing to serve before presenting them to the designated individuals for review. When the time ends the names collected should be put forward to the congregation for their evaluation.

In your personal evaluation you could develop a flow chart. Put the name of the person on a checklist of the qualifications and check off those present or absent. If you find a weakness or several weaknesses these should be reported in writing to the minister or eldership. If you are not certain of the presence or absence of items then you will need to find out before you make your decision. This selection process will take diligent study on your part because this is one of the most important tasks a congregation will perform. And keep in mind you must personally know any negative concerns to be true and not just go by rumors. Reliable witnesses are necessary to condemn anyone under any circumstances.

Remember the “good ole boy” method is not compatible with the Holy Spirit’s requirements. Many men in the congregation are personable people, as they should be, but this does not mean they are qualified. If a nice personable person is suggested for an elder but he is not qualified, you should not just let this pass and remain silent about the process. If you remained silent in the selection process will you remain silent when trouble arises?

One of the reasons why some men do not step forward is their hesitation of being so closely examined. We must all remember that God is examining and will continue to examine our lives. It is better to be aware of and correct the flaws now in this life than

to be made aware of them later. The status of your soul and the souls of your family may be in jeopardy by the choices you make.

When you have thoroughly studied the candidates put forth your evaluation should be made known to the elders, minister or the designated persons. Before the appointment of a replacement for Judas the apostles prayed to God for His help in their selection. A congregation may want to have prayers before the selection process and ask God for wisdom in that process.

When the selection process is over and the individual or individuals have been selected they will need to be installed. The installation procedure is not found in Scripture. We can observe from Acts 14:23 the apostle Paul and his companion, Barnabas, laid hands on the designees with prayer and fasting. Can we deduce from the wording that the time not spent on eating could be given over to prayer? God gave us the qualifications and told us to appoint men. We should pray for their well being and for their service rendered on behalf of the congregation. The installation is a way to recognize the man or men in their new duties of service. They have met the qualifications required of the Holy Spirit and now the congregation needs to recognize their new duties as shepherds, bishops and elders.

In the case where there have not previously been elders, the new elders will have to develop and implement a plan of direction both internally and externally. If deacons have not been appointed then the new elders should proceed to fill these positions as noted by the qualifications given by the Holy Spirit in 1 Timothy 3. This task will require time and study. Meanwhile, the congregation must perform its duties of evangelism, edification and benevolence. The new elders should sit down with the minister and lay out a plan to move the congregation forward in the local area, and decide on support for national or international evangelism. The amount of time and budget given to the latter two items will be dictated by the funds available.

The elders need to remind themselves that a minister is not called an evangelist for a title but for a duty performed. He should never be used as an elder stand-in and put forward to resolve all problems before the congregation. The elders and minister have different spheres of influence. If you took the job to be a ministerial director then your role as a shepherd is extremely limited and will be ineffective. You, as elders, need to inform the minister that you want the truth and nothing but the truth preached from the pulpit. You should back up this type of preaching by public statements of support. When a complaint about his preaching comes forth your first question should be, "Did he preach the truth?" If the answer is yes then your reply should be easy; "He is doing what was required of him from the Lord and requested by the eldership." If the answer is negative ask the person to identify the error so it can be corrected.

As an elder you should support your minister by giving encouraging comments and a hearty amen at the close of a truthful, forceful and compassionately given sermon. It will let the congregation know where the eldership stands on the issues preached from the pulpit. One of the major problems in the brotherhood is the silence

of the elders on these types of sermons. For example, some elderships are shamed by sermons on abortion, homosexuality, embryonic stem cell research and likeminded subjects because they are perceived as being political.

A new eldership will need to decide on weekly, biweekly or monthly meetings to discuss congregational affairs. Many congregations seem to feel monthly meetings are sufficient. However, you should realize that problems and needs do not always coincide with your meeting plans. Be wary of handling problems immediately before or after services, because this takes the eldership away from the congregation and visitors. This is a time when the shepherds should be among the flock.

A new eldership needs to know that their influence and efforts locally should be their priority. Your responsibility is to evangelize your area as much as possible. Though local evangelism is your number one priority you will need to consider requests for financial support that continuously flow in. Though you can help all works with your prayers you will not be able to help them all financially. You will need to study your budget and decide on how much you can give to selected good works. If you decided early that your efforts would be for specific works in certain areas, individuals or congregations, then your efforts can be focused and are more easily overseen.

Having deacons serving under the leadership of the eldership is a great advantage. The work can be divided up among them and funds can be budgeted for their specific works. A group of dedicated deacons will aid the elders in performing their major function which is to act as shepherds.

As new elders you will be familiar with other elderships you have observed in the past. You should emulate those practices that are sound and discard those which are not. You should not emulate practices that are dated. Time changes and so does society. We have a responsibility to place the Gospel truth within the geographical location and chronological period in which you find yourselves. Determining how best to do this will probably take up several meetings. Remember you do not bend the Word to fit the shape of society, but rather you let the Gospel transform the society to fit God's requirements. However, you will always need to be looking for new ways and opportunities to fulfill Mark 16:15.

You will need to put your newfound zeal and energy to work in stabilizing the flock and reaching out for new members. You will find in any congregation a diversity of opinions. Diversity in a biological system implies stability; however, in the church it is called factionalism. Unity is the cry of the scripture (Eph4:1-6). Your function is to keep that unity of the Spirit.

To be a cohesive and spiritually enriched body the congregation should make use of all the talents available. Elders who are not teaching should do so as soon as possible. You should review the curricula of the congregation for soundness and balance. You will need to establish guidelines for materials and translations used in the classes. New members should be apprised of these regulations.

New members should meet with the eldership before being added to the congregation. The best way to avoid trouble is to not invite it in. You have been appointed as doorkeepers to the body (Jn 10:7). Doorkeepers do not allow wolves into the flock. Having previous membership at another congregation does not imply faithfulness and soundness. Rejection at the door is better than trying to remove them later. An elder needs to be aware of the congregations in the local area for this very reason. Trouble arising in another congregation will soon reach your doors. You need to work to keep that trouble out. By discussion and questioning early it may be possible to avoid the spread of their divisive viruses. We know that infections can be spread rapidly. The most contagious types are those of the respiratory tract (spread by mouth and contact). Church trouble can be spread by the same method, that is, by word of mouth and close contact with the uninfected (faithful). Your job is to prevent the infection of the faithful with the virus of deceit. You are to act as a filter to remove the impure from the pure. The filter is the Word and your job is to hold it in place so it can work.

If you are a new elder being added to an existing eldership your transition will be much easier if it is a united eldership that you are entering. If the eldership is divided on a doctrinal issue each faction will attempt to enlist you. You must study the issue and act according to a sound interpretation of the Word. The contentious faction should be urged to resign or leave. Hopefully, this will not be your situation.

A new elder entering an existing eldership should provide help, comfort and aid to the other elders. The unity of the group is important. You must realize you cannot speak for or decide for the group. I have observed such situations when one elder took it upon himself to make a decision and then required the others to support it. This is not unity but rather evidence of Diotropean arrogance (3 Jn 9).

A new elder will bring new talents and dimensions to an existing eldership. A good eldership will take advantage of these new skills and put them to work to benefit the whole. The division of labor is a sound biological process that our Creator placed in all levels of His creation. A cell has many organelles (units) within its structure. The unity and harmony of these components working together are the characteristics of all living systems. Paul covers this example at the anatomical level in 1 Corinthians 12:12ff, and summarizes them in verse 25. Both the Lord and Paul recognized the necessity of unity for the sake of the whole.

Think about why some chemicals are poisonous to the working of the cell. We know that cyanide is a poison. Cyanide does its work by binding to a certain enzyme and disrupting the process of respiration. Cyanide is a molecular binding agent capable of producing death. The other extreme is a loosing action. Cells all divide at various rates regulated by environmental factors such as temperature and nutrients. We know that some environmental factors cause cancer, such as tobacco tars, alcohol and drugs. A carcinogenic substance (cancer causing) will release the cell from its normal restraining mechanism and the cell will multiply rapidly. This produces a tumor which might spread. A spreading tumor is called malignant or cancerous whereas others do not spread and are called benign. These agents are loosing agents.

It is amazing that what happens at a cellular level can happen at the individual and congregational levels. Those factions wanting to bind new doctrines to the Word cause death just as those who want to loose from the Word of God. We know that the Word is able to transform us into what is good, acceptable and perfect (Rom 12:1-2). A bound word or a loosed word will not transform anyone to properly obey and live God's plan.

In biochemistry we talk about enzymes and their work. An enzyme is a biological catalyst (an agent which aids and speeds up a chemical reaction in living cells) for the proper function of living systems. You are to be a catalyst in the Lord's work either in an existing eldership or a new one. As such you will either work apart from the current eldership or in unison with them. The latter is desirable, wholesome and God inspired. The unity of the Spirit is the only pathway that leads home, and the eldership is to shepherd the flock along that path.

The unity of the Spirit will cause the elders to work together in harmony. A divided eldership will not and cannot bring harmony to the congregation. Opinions and discussions of doctrinal issues may become tense; however, civility must be maintained. Someone with a hot temper should not be tolerated and will disrupt harmony on all occasions. "Not given to violence" is a characteristic of an elder and one who resorts to it has forfeited his right to be one. An elder who frequently uses temper outbursts in meetings should be reprimanded and if he continues to do so should be asked to resign. If the other elders overlook these outbursts they are not doing what is required of them.

Any grievous issue should be discussed until a common agreement can be reached on expedient matters. Doctrinal items must be, can be and should be decided only by the Word. Opinions are not acceptable under these conditions.

An eldership should meet frequently and feel comfortable with each other's fellowship. This type of environment is conducive for a good working relationship. The eldership should also meet formally and informally with the minister on a regular basis. These two congregational spheres of influence are at the core of its effectiveness.

A congregation should have both elders and deacons. The sphere of influence is as follows: elders, spiritual and deacons, physical matters. The qualifications of the deacons are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Paul has specified what the Holy Spirit requires of these men. The eldership should seek out men in the congregation who fulfill these qualities. They should likewise be placed before the congregation for approval in the manner done for the eldership.

The deacons must be assigned some duties. Do not appoint deacons without responsibility. The appointed deacons in Acts 6 had a job to do. The apostles wanted to be devoted to spreading the Word and other spiritual matters. The number of deacons appointed will be related to the tasks available for assignment.

Keep in mind a deacon is not an elder substitute. Deacons are not to decide the spiritual conduct of the congregation. Their input should be welcomed but not seen as final. Spiritual matters are not to be decided by a vote and majority rules. However, deacons should be treated in such a way that indicates their contributions are respected and valued.

The deacons should report to the elders about the progress or the lack thereof within their assigned duty or duties. The congregation needs to know what duties are assigned to each deacon so that they can go to the right one when needing assistance. When the members come to the elders they should refer them to a specific deacon assigned to those tasks. Deacons who are asked to assign members to specific functions should refer their names to the eldership to ascertain their spiritual maturity. Though the elders have authority as overseers their relationship with the deacons must be one of servant to servant and not one of superior to less superior. This concept goes back to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12 concerning the various parts of the church body.

In many instances the deacons are younger men serving under the oversight of those who are older. The word "elder" refers to one who is older. An eldership may see the deacons as "in-service trainees" for the eldership. This is not a bad idea because the qualifications are nearly identical. However, a man does not automatically qualify for the eldership just because he has served as a deacon. And yet godly service by a deacon is the best source available for potential elders. In my many years as division and department chair in the science department of the university for which I worked, I observed many capable part-time instructors. It was from this group of individuals that the full time staff was selected. What you have seen and heard first hand in individuals is a better guide than what you might discern from personnel records. When the appointments for deacons are made they should be viewed as possible elders for the future.

Paul admonished Timothy to "Preach the Word!" (2 Tim 4:2) and to "Hold steadfast to the Gospel" (1 Tim 6:14). On these two admonitions stands the preacher's role before a congregation and God. Brother Wayne Jackson in his book, *Before I Die* wrote, "Preach...the Gospel of Christ, not philosophy, human speculation, or comedic anecdotes" (page 277). On page 278 of the same book he adds this comment; "There will be those (even in the church) who will refuse to tolerate Gospel preaching any longer." Let this never be said of you during your time as an elder.

As an elder one of your chief responsibilities will be to hire a minister to place before the congregation. He will be your mouthpiece from the pulpit. It will be the preacher who leads the congregation in the instruction of God's Word from "season unto season." His lead must be to give only the pure Gospel faithfully presented and lived. He is your representative. If, and when, he does not faithfully carry out this task set before him it is your duty to rectify the situation either by admonition or dismissal. A sick congregation often begins in the pulpit or the classroom. Do not let your flock be fed "dog food" when you have a Book full of "sheep food" that will enrich and cure. Spiritual food is a must for congregational vitality and growth.

A study of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 will show how division is sown, cultured and maintained. In Revelation 2:14-17 the congregation at Pergamos let two things happen: 1. They allowed false doctrine in; 2. They added the insult of another false teaching. My concern is who allowed, maintained and fostered this insult to God's Word? If it was the minister why did not the elders remove him from his evangelical position? If it was the elders why did not the congregation remove them and restore harmony? As an elder there is a time to talk, reflect and discuss. However, there is also a time to act! Whom is the Lord going to be displeased with? Yes, the false teachers, their supporters and those who were silent about the leprous situation. How much pus must drain from a wound before you realize it is infected? Factionalism is driven by ministers, supported by willing elders and funded by blind (to the Word) congregations.

What is a good minister? The following list will give you some ideas. The list is by no means the final statement on this but is simply given to allow you to see some of the things I have observed.

1. He is your (the elders) number one public relations person.
 - a. His lessons must be sound and balanced.
 - b. His demeanor is apparent in and out of the pulpit.
 - c. He is a willing servant.

2. A good minister knows his church family.
 - a. He is friendly.
 - b. He visits often.
 - c. He gives wise counseling.

3. A good minister is a professional and knows how to use his time.
 - a. Lesson preparation.
 - b. Forceful presentations.
 - c. Defends the Word.
 - d. Edifies the members.
 - e. Shows humility.

4. A good preacher is hard to find.
 - a. If you have one, keep him.
 - b. If you do not, try to train him.
 - c. If this cannot be done after diligent attempts, then dismiss him.

5. An eldership and the minister show harmony in love for the truth.
 - a. They grow together.
 - b. Show the preacher you care for him and his family.

Now that we have devoted some time to the installation of elders and their introduction to the work, let us discuss the removal of an elder. This is a controversial issue in the brotherhood. The only scriptural procedure that I can find is 1 Timothy 5:19 com-

bined with Matthew 18:15-17. 1 Timothy 5:19 shows the necessity of two or more witnesses. This group alone should go to the offending elder and discuss with him the accusations made against him by the witnesses.

If all parties have established an understanding the matter is closed. If the truth of the situation is correct and the offending elder will not repent then others should go and confront the elder about his sinful behavior. A further refusal will cause the group to go to the congregation and seek a removal of the elder from his position of leadership and, if serious enough, from the congregation as well.

A congregation with unity, harmony, sound preaching, capable teachers and that is filled with love would be ideal. You as elders are to foster this ideal. Ideals are never achieved without work and dedication from the eldership, deacons, minister and the members. This is easy to say but much harder to put into practice because we war against principalities and powers that will attempt to defeat our efforts.

May God bless you for your study of the eldership. May God bless you for the work you do in His kingdom.

LESSON 6 – QUESTIONS

1. Define the word “recognize” and how may this be applied to the selection process?
2. Outline the process for elder and deacon selection.
3. When should elder training begin?
4. Proper understanding of what the Holy Spirit reveals in Timothy and Titus will be needed for selection. How may this be obtained?
5. The comparison of the characteristics of the available men and the qualifications is the first step in the selection process. How may this best be accomplished?

What is a checklist? (see appendix one)

6. Why is close examination by Christian brothers and sisters a hindrance for some to step forward?
7. Is prayer essential in the selection process and what benefit is it?
8. A new or existing eldership will need to assess the congregation and make plans to win souls in your area. What is assessment and how can it be put in place?
9. How does an eldership support sound preaching?

What should they do when “uncertain sounds” exist in the pulpit and the classroom?

10. When an issue becomes political does it remove it from the moral realm of comment and discussion?
11. The first and perhaps the only priority of an eldership is found where?
12. What are the roles of the deacons in a congregation?

Should deacons have a function to perform or a title to display?

13. Society often shapes our thinking therefore our preaching and teaching should mirror its impact. True or False
14. In what ways has political correctness, multiculturalism, post-modernism or situation ethics influenced your decisions?
15. The curricula are not any better than the talent available to use it. Will teacher training or workshops be part of your assessment program?
16. Can a congregation use any available translation for scripture reading, pulpit and classroom use?

How does a translation differ from a paraphrased version?

17. Should elders allow all who come forward to place membership?

How can a few minutes talking while the congregation waits be equal to 20 or 30 minutes private meeting with those wishing to place membership?

18. What is division of labor in a functioning organization?

19. Who is worse, those who loose or those who bind?

Can both be deadly to your congregation?

20. How is an elder comparable to a catalyst in the Lord's work?

Is the minister the major catalyst for congregational effectiveness?

21. What is the final arbiter in doctrinal matters?

22. How many meetings of the eldership are necessary to accomplish the work of the congregation?

23. What are the spheres of influence in each of the following groups:

Elders,

Deacons,

Minister, and

Members?

24. In order to have a functioning congregation must all be involved?
25. Are the deacons junior elders?
26. What is the best source of future elders in your congregation?
27. The major public relations person for your congregation is the _____.
28. What are elders' and minister's respective roles in a congregation?

Elders:

Minister:

29. How is discord in a congregation sown? (Note Rev 2 and 3)
30. How can factionalism be treated in a congregation among its various spheres of influence?
31. The removal of an elder requires the study and use of what two scriptures?
32. What would be an ideal congregation of the Lord's body?

FAITHFUL CHILDREN
ALTERNATE VIEW TO THE VIEW PRESENTED IN THE ELDERSHIP COURSE (4495)*

Titus 1:6 — If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having (ἔχων) children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. . .

1 Timothy 3:4,5 — One who rules his own house well, having (ἔχοντα) his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?).

- I. Does “having children” include an elder’s children after they have gone from their father’s home?
 - A. The words “having” in both of the above scriptures are present tense participles in the Greek language which requires the qualification under consideration (ie: believing children) to be present in the elder, or the man under consideration, now, at this time.
 - B. “Having” cannot be understood to be any of the following:
 1. “Having some”
 2. “Having none,”
 3. “Having had,”
 4. “Will have,” or
 4. “Will have had.”
 - C. Some say the children, after they have gone from their father’s home, are not included in this qualification. If this is so they are included in this qualification only while they are in their father’s home!
 1. If they are included only while they are in their father’s home, and one can serve as an elder after all the children are gone from home, then the man would qualify on the basis of “having had” faithful children. This violates God’s requirement set forth in these verses.
 2. If the principle of “having had” is true it must apply with equal force to all God’s qualifications to be an elder such as:
 - a. “Having had” a wife,

- b. “Having had” the qualification of being a lover of good,
 - c. “Having had” the qualification of being just,
 - d. “Having had” the qualification of being patient (gentle),
 - e. “Having had” the qualification of a good report (good testimony) from without,
 - f. “Having had” the qualification of being not contentious, or
 - g. “Having had” any other qualification.
3. If this is so, then once a man has been qualified, and then all the children have left home, he is qualified to serve as an elder until his death. The man can never become disqualified if this theory is true!
- D. If the requirement of “having” faithful children does not apply after all the children have left home, upon what basis could it be said that an elder, whose children have all left home has faithful children? NONE!
- 1. One result of this theory is that when the last child has left home the man can no longer serve as an elder because there are no children who are faithful and now in subjection to the man.
 - 2. This would disqualify every godly qualified man from ever serving as an elder after the last child has left home, for the requirement of scripture is that he have faithful children in subjection to him now, at this time!
- E. The argument has been put forth that a girl, when she marries, is to be in subjection to her husband and, therefore cannot be in subjection to her father also. This argument has several problems, some are:
- 1. This assumes there is one, and only one, authority in her life — her husband. This is not true. She is to be in subjection to governments, elders and God to name a few.
 - 2. This also assumes that the child’s past actions cover her current conduct (good or bad).
 - a. This would also demand that a man who had children who disqualified him while they were in his home and then, later in life, became faithful Christians, would continue to disquali-

fy him. If their change in life (from good to bad) cannot disqualify a man neither can their change in life (from bad to good) qualify him. To say otherwise is to abandon all wisdom.

3. There is no scriptural (or logical) argument, command, example or necessary inference to cover this theory. Therefore, this is an argument from the wisdom of men, not God!

F. Obviously, the answer to the question - "Does 'having children' include an elder's children after they have gone from their father's home?" - is an emphatic – YES!

II. What must a man do who is serving as an elder who does not qualify?

A. He can listen to the pleading of the eldership or the church to sinfully remain in the office. This is sinful behavior because it follows the wisdom of men rather than follow what God has already ordained.

1. We know God's ways are not man's ways (Isa 55:8,9).
2. We know we are to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

B. The answer to the question - "What must a man do who is serving as an elder who does not qualify?" - is he must step aside (resign).

1. This keeps the eldership righteous,
2. This keeps the membership pure, and
3. This keeps the work of the church in line with God's will.
4. An unqualified eldership produces impurity in all of these areas.
5. After resigning it is then possible for this man, with God's help, to save the unfaithful child or children. Then, if he still holds all the other qualifications, let him serve again.

III. A godly attitude is necessary.

A. The Holy Spirit makes a man an elder with his cooperation by the man studying the scriptures and applying its truths to his life.

B. The congregation can then recognize the man as qualified to be an elder by comparing him with the qualifications set forth in God's word.

- C. When thus recognized the congregation installs him into the eldership.
- D. When a man continues to serve, or assumes the office of an elder, when God has said he is not qualified, what is the condition of his soul? He is lost!
- E. An elder must not only give account for the souls he shepherds but for his own soul as well. May every man serving as an elder do this with joy (Heb 13:17).

* Many good brethren hold the position on “believing and obedient children” brother David Campbell presented in this course. However, at the same time, many other good brethren hold the position presented in this paper which has been added to the end of his course. This addendum is added in the spirit of love and is not intended as a rebuke or insult to brother Campbell and those who hold the position he does. This is strictly presenting the alternate view.

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