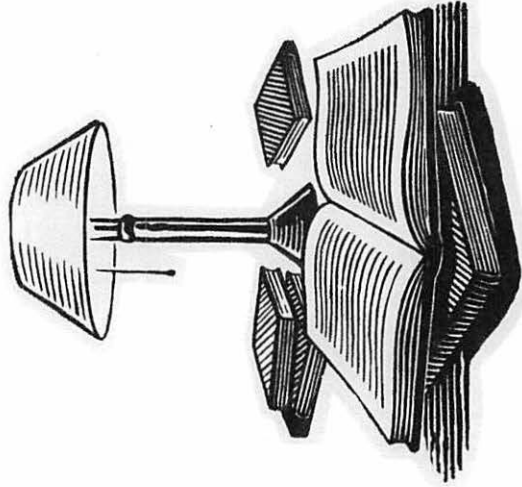


TWO DEBATES ON
CONGREGATIONAL
DECISION-MAKING
AND THE ROLE OF ELDERS

Vance E. Trefethen - Tom M. Roberts

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Introduction

The debates printed here were first published in *Guardian of Truth* magazine in August (first debate) and November (second debate) of 1994.

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**TWO DEBATES ON
CONGREGATIONAL
DECISION-MAKING
AND THE ROLE OF ELDERS**

Vance E. Trefethen - Tom M. Roberts

First Debate

"Resolved: The scriptures teach that the pattern of decision-making in matters of congregational judgment must always include the whole church (including women) under male leadership in all local churches (both with and without elders)."

Affirm: Vance E. Trefethen

Deny: Tom M. Roberts

Second Debate

"Resolved: The scriptures teach that the elders of a local church are authorized to assemble privately to make decisions in matters of judgment for the local church before and without calling together the whole congregation."

Affirm: Tom M. Roberts

Deny: Vance E. Trefethen

First Affirmative

Vance E. Trefethen

Proposition: "The scriptures teach that the pattern of decision-making in matters of congregational judgment must always include the whole church (including women) under male leadership in all local churches (both with and without elders)." I ask each reader to join me in affirming this proposition.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in my articles are my own and are not intended to represent in any way the views of the elders or members of my congregation.

Introduction: Who is Vance and why should you agree with him? I work as a database administrator for a large corporation, and I've never been employed as a full-time evangelist. I am an experienced public teacher of the scriptures and I have written two books on Bible topics. I have no grudges against any congregation or eldership, and I have never been "hired" or "fired" as a local preacher. I respect the concept of elders as given in the New Testament and hope to serve as one someday. I used to believe the negative position in this debate, but I changed my mind as the scriptures convicted my conscience.

Definitions: "The scriptures" -- the 66 books of the Bible. "Teach" -- instruct by command, example, or necessary inference. "Pattern" -- "anything proposed for or worthy of imitation" (Web. Coll. Dict. 5th Ed.). "Decision-making in matters of congregational judgment" -- actions of a local church that involve 1) choosing between several scripturally authorized courses of collective action by selecting the one most advantageous under that congregation's circumstances; or 2) making a determination in some matter affecting the congregation that God has left to human reasoning to figure out, while following whatever inspired principles may govern the matter in general; distinguished from "matters of faith," which are doctrines and principles decided by Deity. "Include" -- "to take in or comprise as a part of the whole" (The Merriam-Webster Dict.). "Whole church (including women)" -- all the male and female members of a local *ekklesia*, or congregation, of Christians. "Under male leadership" -- subject to the instruction,

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teaching, presiding or chairmanship over a group by one or more male Christians, as is commonly practiced by male adult Bible class teachers and male song-leaders. "All local churches (both with and without elders)" -- every congregation of Christians, regardless of whether they have pastors (or bishops, or presbyters, all of which are synonymous with elders).

What this debate is not about: 1) It is not about Feminism. We both oppose the evil influence of Feminism on the church and the family. 2) It is not about women serving as preachers or bishops. I object to such violations of God's plan for women. 3) It is not about whether churches should have elders or whether elders have leadership, oversight, or responsibility in the local church. I believe elders have vital, authoritative work to do in overseeing and leading a local church. 4) It is not about whether women should serve as teachers or leaders with authority over men in the church. We both believe God has given roles of congregational leadership and teaching to males. 5) It is not about whether elders or a few Christians may ever meet privately to discuss the work of the local church. I've met privately many times with fellow-Christians, elders, and family members to talk about the work of the local church, and the Bible contains approved examples of such private meetings.

What this debate is about: This debate is about what constitutes the Bible pattern for congregational decision-making in matters of judgment and whether private meetings have authority to make decisions in matters of judgment and bind them on the congregation at large. It will be accompanied by another debate, which I will publish along with this one in a single volume; in which Tom will affirm that matters of judgment may be decided privately without the whole congregation.

Some believe elders may, should, or must decide some or all congregational matters privately. (The qualifiers are supplied because all who believe in private decision-making don't agree on all the particulars.) And some teach that churches without elders should have men-only business meetings as a "substitute" for elders to privately make decisions in matters of judgment for the whole church. There are lots of other private methods of decision-making churches might want to use as well. But any system of decision-making proposed for any local church must stand or fall solely on

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the basis of whether it is authorized in the Bible. If the NT shows churches making decisions privately by elders or men's business meetings or some other private method, then churches should follow that pattern, to the exclusion of all other methods. But if the NT shows that churches always decided matters of judgment by involving the whole church under male leadership, then that is the pattern churches today should follow--to the exclusion of all others.

Arguments: 1. Acts 6:1-6. It is a matter of Divinely revealed faith that males should lead congregational work, and a matter of faith as to their qualifications. It is a matter of judgment to select which particular males meet the qualifications and should be appointed to do the work. The easiest way to handle this would have been for the apostles to hold a private meeting and decide everything for the congregation. Instead, they followed a more cumbersome course of action and "called the multitude of the disciples" together to handle the matter. The Apostles explicitly avoided the most "expedient" method in favor of involving the whole church. Anyone who would have prohibited women from attending this meeting would have been encouraging the women to violate the Apostles' command. It is disturbing that some today *prohibit* women from doing what the Apostles *commanded* women to do (cf Rom 10:2).

"And the saying pleased the whole multitude" (6:5) shows the presence of the whole church. "...And they chose Stephen, a man full of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus..." (6:5). The antecedent of "they" is the whole multitude, which is synonymous with the "whole church" of my proposition. "They chose...[7 men]" meets the definition of decision-making among scripturally authorized alternatives. The inspired men gave the qualifications, while the whole church exercised judgment in choosing men who met the qualifications. The whole church was called together, the whole church agreed to appoint men, and the whole church chose the men, all under male leadership (the Apostles, with 7 other males selected as leaders over the benevolent work), in a congregation where no elders are mentioned. Acts 6:1-6 meets all the requirements of my proposition for a church without elders.

2. Acts 15:12-27. There are two types of "decisions" in this

Chapter. Peter said "God made choice" (15:7) about the Gentiles hearing the Gospel. Acts 15:28-29 shows that the Holy Spirit revealed what doctrines were binding on the Gentiles. None of the deliberations or activities in Acts 15 could have changed God's decision. None of our meetings or discussions today can change anything God has decided, either.

But 15:12-27 shows a congregational decision made by the Jerusalem church about communicating a message to the church at Antioch. 15:12 says "the multitude" was present for the discussion of the doctrinal matter of faith concerning Gentile salvation, and the context continues with the issue of communication with the Antioch church. "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren" (15:22 KJV).

The Holy Spirit did not send or choose the men. The church handled it as a matter of judgment. "22. It seemed good (εδοξε), 'it was voted'--the Greek word being that regularly used for taking a decision in assembly." (*The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 9, p. 205) "Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas..." (NIV).

Acts 15 shows that "the multitude" (15:12), "the apostles and elders with the whole church" (15:22), "having assembled with one accord" (15:27), decided to send chosen men, and made the choice of Judas and Silas as the particular men (15:22). The process of decision-making included the whole church under male leadership (Apostles and elders, with 2 males selected as messengers/leaders), meeting all the requirements of my proposition for a church with elders.

3. 1 Cor 5:1-5, 11-13. This passage uses the second meaning of "matters of judgment" given earlier. God has decided that sexual immorality, covetousness, etc., are sinful and that Christians who practice them should be purged out of a local church. The decision we make is a judgment about whether someone is practicing these sins and has reached the point of needing to have this passage invoked upon them. A church must make judgments about erring members: "For what have I to do to judge them also that are

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without? do not ye judge them that are within?" (1 Cor 5:12). How does a church make this judgment?

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan..." (1 Cor 5:4-5). Who gathers together? They are "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor 1:2), which was made up of male and female members (cf 1 Cor 7:15-16). We must infer that this takes place under male leadership from 1 Tim 2:11-12, which would regulate the conduct of the men and women. Paul said the things he wrote were for "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:2). Therefore, decision-making in a matter of judgment must include the whole church (1 Cor 5:4), including women, under male leadership (1 Tim 2:11-12) in all local churches (1 Cor 1:2).

4. Matt 18:15-17. This is similar to 1 Cor 5 because it requires a church to render judgment in the matter of a sinning member, but in this case one accused of sinning personally against a fellow-saint. Christians must follow the steps Jesus gave to resolve the matter privately. If the accused doesn't hear the individual, or the witnesses, it becomes an issue for "the church." We've all studied the meaning of *ekklesia*, "church," for many years. *Ekklesia* refers to an assembly or congregation, and this passage teaches that decision-making in matters of congregational judgment involves the whole church (*ekklesia*) including women (because women are part of the *ekklesia*) under male leadership (1 Tim 2:11-12) in all local churches (because Jesus has authority to command all saints to observe this, cf Matt 28:18), with or without elders.

Questions for Tom:

1) Can a church ever decide a matter of judgment by including the whole church under male leadership? If so, what passage authorizes it?

2) Is there a pattern for decision-making in churches without elders?

3) Are elders limited by command, example, and necessary inference in the way they lead a church?

4) Is there any example of elders in a NT church deciding a matter of judgment without including the whole church?

5) Does *ekklesia* ever refer to a private meeting of elders or male-Christians-only in the NT?

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6) Does any scripture authorize any unqualified men to act as "substitutes" for elders?

Conclusions: I used to believe and practice private decision-making. I changed because of two facts: 1) The New Testament gives a clear pattern of decision-making in matters of judgment: the whole church under male leadership; 2) No command, example, or inference shows a church handling matters of congregational judgment any other way. Four cases command or exemplify the method of decision-making I affirm. No passage teaches anyone to make decisions without involving the whole church. Please join me in affirming that we must follow the inspired pattern in all that we do in service to God.

First Negative

Tom M. Roberts

This debate is important because Vance suggests a radical departure from the practice of the NT and makes his unscriptural "pattern" a test of fellowship. As one who serves as an evangelist and an elder in a local church, I deny his affirmative as both unscriptural and impractical. Our difference is not personal nor is his honesty or sincerity impugned.

Definitions: I commend Vance in appealing to the scriptures. However "pattern" should reflect a binding quality beyond that of his dictionary (2 Tim. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:16; Heb. 8:5). Since Vance is advocating a pattern that requires "congregational decision-making in matters of judgment" and requires "an increased role for women in the decision-making processes of local churches" (Vance Trefethen, *Confusion or Consensus*, New Horizon Books, Montgomery, AL, 1993, p. 3), his obligation is to show that pattern. He brands private decision-making by elders as "without authority" (ibid, p. 6), thus sinful. Since a pattern allows no deviations, if it can be shown that a single exception to his pattern exists, he has no pattern. However, Vance is confused about what makes a pattern. He states "Acts 15 is the only Bible pattern there is on the matter" (ibid, p. 32), but attempts to add Acts 6 and 1 Cor. 5, etc., to that pattern. Either Acts 15 is the "sole" (only) pattern or it is not. When defining "decision-making in matters of congregational judgment" Vance emphasized that this addressed matters of judgment and not matters of faith. Agreed, but we differ on "decision-making" itself! His pattern calls for every decision to be made by the whole congregation (including women), under male leadership. This would be required in every congregation, whether or not there were elders. I suggest that this makes elders mere figureheads, with no scriptural authority to decide any matter. Though he affirms that he believes elders have "authoritative work to do in overseeing and leading a local church," he also requires a "consensus" (ibid, p. 22, 24, 25, et al): a contradiction of terms. Consensus is "a collective opinion, general agreement" (Funk & Wagnalls Std. Dict.) in which women carry the same force as

men in "decision-making" or there is no true consensus. "Consensus" is not found in the scriptures! It fits well in a democracy, but the church is a theocracy where elders are specifically mandated (Acts 14:23; 1 Pt. 5:2, etc.). It is exceedingly strange that his entire pattern is built upon a word that is not found in the scriptures (either specifically or in principle).

What this debate is not about: 1) "Not about feminism"? Though his disclaimer is appreciated, it is futile. I respect that he rejects feminism as such, but his position opens the door to the very evil he denounces. "Consensus" puts women on a par with men in decision-making. If a consensus of women in the majority disagrees with the consensus of men in the minority (which is true in many churches), he has placed the decision of the women over the men. The women may be humble and discreet, but either they have decision-making authority or they do not! If the minority of the men over-ride the decisions of the majority of the women, consensus would be destroyed. But when he allows the decisions of the women to prevail, he has violated 1 Tim. 2:11-15. His pattern has put him on the horns of a dilemma. 2) "It is not about women serving as preachers and bishops?" Again, I respect his disclaimer and join with him in denouncing such as a violation. But as a practical matter, once he opens the gate to decision-making women, it is foolish to think that all will be content with this "increased role" and nothing more. Already, congregations exist where women are leading in public worship. Some allow women to teach mixed classes of men and women "under male leadership" or as "co-teachers." His position, however unwitting, advances women in that direction and cannot logically prohibit it. 3). "Not about whether elders have leadership, oversight, or responsibility in the local church?" But of course it is. His definition of "decision-making" and "consensus" eviscerates Biblical elders. Elders have no oversight in a consensus. Responsibility adheres to those making decisions and since the consensus decision is the congregation's, the responsibility is theirs and not the elders. 4) Addressed in #2 above. 5) No disagreement here.

What this debate is about: The role of elders. Does the scriptural pattern require congregational meetings (including women) every single time there are decisions of judgment to be made? or: Do elders

have authority from God to meet privately and make judgment decisions that bind the whole church?

Arguments: 1) Acts 6:1-6. According to Vance it is a sin for private meetings of males to make decisions for the whole church. But look at the text. The apostles 1) privately decided to change previous practices, 2) privately decided to stop serving tables, 3) privately decided to have others serve tables, 4) privately decided that these would be men and not women, 5) privately decided there would be seven of these men, 6) privately decided the qualifications of these seven and 7) privately decided that they would appoint the men and not allow the church to do so. Yes, what the apostles privately decided pleased the whole multitude and they had a role in choosing the men who would serve. The whole church can be, even should be, involved in some congregational actions. Clearly his "pattern" denies the very thing found in Acts 6: private decisions by males that are bound upon the whole congregation. His pattern is not found in Acts 6. It violates the "traditions of the apostles" (2 Thes. 2:15; 3:16). 2) Acts 15:12-27. His "pattern" calls for a congregational decision with no private meetings. Though the action "pleased the whole church" there were private meetings and his pattern fails in the very place he affirms as his "sole pattern." Relating Gal. 2:1-10 to the meeting in Acts 15 will reveal the flaw in his exegesis. Gal. 2 shows that when Paul went to Jerusalem, he met privately (2:2) with "those of repute." Acts 15:2 shows this private meeting to be with "the apostles and elders" who made the decision to give the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas. After this, they met with the whole church (15:4), then had another private meeting with the apostles and elders (15:6). Again, there is no disagreement with involving the church in the process but his pattern denies the truth of these private meetings where decisions were made. These multiple exceptions to his "sole pattern" show that he has no pattern. 3) 1 Cor. 5:1-5, 11-13. There has never been a problem with involving the whole church in various processes, including discipline, as in this text. The problem is his assertion that no private decisions can be made that bind the whole church to the decision of the few. Read just a few verses beyond ch. 5, into ch. 6:1-5, and we see the very thing he denies. In the matter of brother going to court against brother, Paul admonishes that

brethren ought not go to court before the unrighteous, but that there should be a "court of the saints" (vs. 1). He advises that we ought to be able to "judge" by finding at least "one wise man who shall be able to decide between brethren" (vs. 5). Here are "wise men" (would elders qualify?) who make decisions for the whole church in disputes between brethren. Vance's pattern is in tatters! 4) Matt. 18:15-17. He recognizes that discipline is a congregational matter and that it should be done under "male leadership!" Could these males be elders? If Vance could see the contradiction between "male leadership" and "decision-making women," this debate would be over. When the church at Antioch sent relief to the needy brethren in Judea (Acts 11:27-30), they sent it to the "elders" (vs. 30). (What decision did the women make?) When the relief went to the elders, did it not go to the churches? In this case, the elders represented the churches which received the benevolence. If discipline began individually and continued until it came before the church, would it not be before the church under the leadership of the elders? Vance will learn that there are scandalous actions of brethren that do not need to be aired before the "whole church" lest they cause weak brethren and babes to stumble. Yes, the whole church can be involved in discipline but under the leadership of the elders. Your pattern is not supported by Matt. 18.

Questions:

- 1) Yes, Acts 6, Acts 15, etc., but this does not prohibit private decisions by male leaders.
- 2) Elders are authorized to make decisions for the church as the passages above prove. If elders cannot make such private decisions, no other group could. But if elders are authorized to do so, in the absence of elders, male leadership prevails, as you yourself propose (1 Tim. 2).
- 3) Yes.
- 4) Yes, as seen above. Additionally, in Acts 11:27-30 it is inferred that the elders decided who, how long and how much, etc.
- 5) No, but this does not rule out an "ekklesia" acting through agency. Examples: 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:23 (messengers of the churches acted on behalf of the church); Acts 11:27-30 (elders received the funds on behalf of the receiving church).
- 6) No, an unqualified man cannot act as or substitute for an elder. But in the absence of elders, male leadership is authorized (1 Tim.

2:11-15) as you admit. Congregations existed for a time without elders (Acts 13:1ff-Acts 14:23). Male leadership is necessarily inferred.

Questions for Vance:

- 1) Do you believe Acts 15:22 authorizes voting?
- 2) Can an "ekklesia" be represented by agency, and if so, is it the same as the ekklesia acting?
- 3) If the majority of a congregation is women and the women disagree with the minority men concerning a matter of judgment, can the majority rule?
- 4) How can women be involved in "decision making," remain in subjection, yet overturn the decision of men?
- 5) Must the entire church be gathered to decide the multitudes of decisions about buying supplies, caring for the needy (including sensitive financial information), hearing complaints between members, investigating scandalous moral actions of members and make every decision about every matter?
- 6) Is an eldership bound by a consensus even though the entire eldership disagrees with it?

I urge brother Trefethen to abandon his faulty pattern which will only generate strife and stumbling among brethren and to turn his considerable talents to edifying (Eph. 4:29).

2nd Affirmative

Vance E. Trefethen

Observations: 1. Tom agrees Acts 6 and 15 both show a church deciding a matter of judgment (Q. 1). But Connie Adams, *Guardian of Truth* 3/3/94 p. 4, said "In both instances divine revelation resolved the problem at hand." 2. Tom agrees women were present in some business meetings in the NT (Q. 1). But Mike Willis, *GT* 3/18/93 p. 185, said "the desire of women to be present at these meetings" is "a usurpation of the authority God gave to men." Bobby Holmes, *GT* 12/2/93 p. 723, said "The *inclusion* of women participants in business meetings thus *violates* her role given in 1 Timothy 2:12..." (ital. in orig.).

I commend his courage in breaking with *GT* on these issues. Perhaps he will receive the blessings of Matt 5:11, as I have.

Arguments: Tom's responses are in italics, and mine follow in regular type.

Makes his pattern a test of fellowship. There is no "test of fellowship" to be found in my proposition or in anything I've written on this topic. Please don't misrepresent me. Jesus decides fellowship in the universal church; local churches handle fellowship for themselves.

"Pattern should reflect a binding quality." You can't get much more binding than "that is the pattern churches should follow--to the exclusion of all others" (1st Aff. ¶6).

He says Acts 15 is the only pattern in his book, but then adds other passages. 1) We aren't debating the format of my book. 2) The quote was taken out of context. It was showing the sole example of how elders lead decision-making, not the cases where elders aren't specifically mentioned (Acts 6, 1 Cor 5, etc.), which are covered elsewhere in the book.

"Elders become mere figureheads with no authority to decide any matter." 1) This confuses "authority" with "private decision-making in matters of judgment." Titus was to "speak, exhort, and reprove with all authority" (Titus 2:15). The evangelist doesn't decide matters of judgment for the church (does he?). "Authority"

doesn't require secret decision-making, else the preacher is an "eviscerated" "mere figurehead."

Do elders have authority to privately make decisions that bind the whole church? "The elders of the local church...are subject to Christ, the head of the church (Col 1:18). Therefore, elders do not, and cannot enact or enforce any other laws than the laws of Christ which are revealed in the Scriptures." (GT 4/21/94 p. 244). Amen.

"Consensus is not found in the scriptures!" 1) The word isn't in my proposition either! 2) The concept is taught in Acts 6:5; Acts 15:22; Acts 15:25; 1 Cor 1:10. 3) "Leadership" and "authority" don't occur in the NT with regard to elders. Do elders have neither?

Including women leads to women overriding men, women preachers, etc. 1) If so, why does he teach that women may be included on some occasions, per Acts 6 and 15 (Q. 1)? Won't the women in Tom's meetings want to become preachers too? 2) Anyone "overriding" others (male or female) in matters of judgment violates 1 Cor 1:10, Eph 4:1-3, Acts 6:5 and Acts 15:22. 3) Abuses don't disprove the practice. Baptism is often abused (sprinkling, infants), but it is still the right thing to do, if we avoid the abuses. 4) Some believe having women participating in mixed Bible classes is a dangerous step toward feminism. Should we forbid it?

"Elders have no oversight in consensus." This confuses "oversight" with "private decision-making." They have no "private decision-making" in the Bible pattern, but lots of "oversight." I challenge for a lexicon defining "oversight" as "private decision-making without congregational involvement."

Acts 6--the Apostles privately decided everything. 1) All the features he gave came after "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them..." (Acts 6:2). Was it "private" (Tom) or did it include "the multitude" (Luke)? 2) My proposition says the pattern must "include (comprise as part of the whole) the whole church." Since he says Acts 6 teaches the whole church is authorized to be included (Q. 1), he admits they were included. 3) Can elders decide whether men or women will serve as leaders over benevolence? Wow--I teach it's a matter of faith that men (not women) are leaders, but Tom says it's a judgment for elders to make privately. Do elders today privately decide the qualifications of deacons? I don't think he believes this argument. 4) Since the

Apostles "called the multitude," I submit that refusal to call the multitude violates the "traditions of the apostles." I believe we should do it the way the Apostles did it. Tom says we don't have to. That, in a nutshell, is the debate.

His pattern calls for decisions with no private meetings, but they had them in:

Gal 2:2. "I laid before them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles but privately before them who were of repute..." Where's the decision in a matter of judgment here? Paul's gospel was Divine inspiration, not congregational judgment.

Gal 2:9. To get a private decision for the church, one must cut off Paul in mid-sentence: "James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship..." He stopped here, but read on: "...that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision;" (Gal 2:9). Who are "we" and "they"? Was the whole church commanded to go to the circumcision or the Gentiles? The "fellowship" was in preaching the gospel, with an agreement to go to different audiences--but it says nothing about binding this evangelistic "decision" on the church. Gal 2:9 will backfire on Tom. Only 3 men met with Paul & Barnabas in Gal 2:9--out of at least 14 "apostles and elders" (12 apostles + at least 2 elders). Either a tiny minority (3/14) of elders or men may make decisions for the church without the other elders or men; or Gal 2:9 is not congregational decision-making, but private action by individuals. Which?

Acts 15:6. 1) This is a discussion about what Gentiles must do to be saved. Do elders today have the right to privately decide what the plan of salvation is? 2) The "multitude" was included in the context, Acts 15:12.

1 Cor 5 includes the whole church, but 1 Cor 6 shows private decisions for the church. 1) I'm glad we agree 1 Cor 5 involves the whole church. 2) 1 Cor 6 isn't about "matters of congregational judgment." It settles a matter while still a private dispute, like the first two steps of Matt 18. 3) 1 Cor 6:5 also backfires. Yes, an elder could be the "one wise man" who settles a dispute privately between 2 saints. Then what? Does the church now change some collective action? Can 1 elder privately decide things for the whole church without involving the other elders? I don't think he believes this.

First Debate: Second Affirmative

Vance will learn some things are too scandalous to be done collectively. 1) More scandalous than fornication that's not even named among the heathens? (1 Cor 5:1) 2) Where in the NT will I "learn" this? 3) If it causes the weak to stumble, why did God command it?

"Yes, the whole church can be involved in discipline but under the leadership of the elders. Your pattern is not supported by Matt 18." The first sentence is my pattern for a church with elders, so the second is wrong. I'm glad we agree that Matt 18 includes the whole church.

Vance must see contradiction between "male leadership" and "decision-making women."

1) If Tom could see the difference between "leadership" and "excluding everyone from participating," this debate would be over. If these were synonymous, elders could never include other men or the whole church. But Tom agrees they should, at least sometimes.

2) "Decision-making women" privately deciding things are just as wrong as men who do so. In the Bible, the whole church participates--not women (or men) deciding things and forcing them on everyone.

Acts 11:27-30 shows private decisions by elders.

1) The decision is in 11:29. "And in proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined [*orizo*] to send a contribution for [*eis*] the relief of the brethren..." The disciples determined to send money for ("unto", "towards") benevolence. If the elders who received it had decided to spend it on a new meeting tent, they would have betrayed the generosity of the donors. 2) Where in Acts 11 are the decisions made privately by elders? Don't just say "it is inferred"--show what phrase infers it and the specific decisions made, and show that they were made without including the whole church. Book, chapter, and verse, please. 3) Handling money doesn't mean "privately deciding" things. Paul and Barnabas handled the money, but they didn't privately decide anything, did they?

"In the absence of elders, male leadership prevails" (Answer to my Q. 2). Notice:

A. "Male leadership prevails" in the absence of elders. (Q. 2)

B. A church with no elders included men and women in decision-

making in the NT (Q. 1).

C. Therefore: Including the whole church in decision-making doesn't violate male leadership. He must give up the arguments about feminism, women usurping authority, etc.

Answers to 1 Neg. Questions:

1) Yes, and I'm willing to modify the negative remarks on "voting" I made in my book, in the interest of honesty and searching for truth. I found the scholarly quote on Acts 15:22 recently while preparing for this debate (Is there any Negative reply?). See also 2 Cor 8:19, where "chosen" means selected by a vote or show of hands (Thayer p. 668; Strong p. 77). "Voting," as radical feminist Alexander Campbell (1835) said when he taught the whole church must be included, means any expression of opinion, whether raising the hand, saying "yes" or "no," etc. Churches with secret decision-making have such voting all the time, among those allowed to participate.

2) Yes to both, provided the scriptures authorize it and the congregation has asked an "agency" to act on its behalf.

3) No.

4) They can't. One group "overturning" another in matters of judgment is wrong, regardless of gender.

5) "Buying supplies"--the whole church gathered and chose servants (*diakoneo*) to do that in Acts 6. "Financial information" was discussed in Acts 6 among the whole church, which is how they knew certain widows were needy. "Hearing complaints"--see above on 1 Cor 6. "Investigating..." isn't "private decision-making." If you find out someone is sinning, you haven't made a decision for the church.

6) If the leaders disagree with the multitude, there is no consensus yet.

Questions for Tom:

1) GT 4/7/94 p. 206 criticized a "rump meeting" of a few men who privately decided to change a church bank account to prevent fraud by others, without including the rest of the men or women. What scripture did they violate?

2) Where in the NT does "authority" refer to the right to privately decide matters of collective judgment?

3) When elders include the whole church in decision-making, do they lose "authority" or "oversight"?

4) Since women are authorized to attend business meetings (1A Q. 1), by what authority could the men decide to exclude them? What other authorized activities may men prohibit women from doing?

Summary: We agree that all 4 cases I gave show the whole church included in matters of congregational judgment. Tom's "exceptions" either deal with matters of faith, individual action, say nothing about private decisions by elders, or show the inclusion of the whole church. Whenever matters of collective judgment were handled in the NT, the whole church was included. Please join me in affirming that we should follow the Bible pattern.

2nd Negative

Tom M. Roberts

My worst fears are being realized in that, as the debate advances, Vance is progressing deeper into error, affirming a position with dreadful consequences of feminine equality and denial of eldership oversight which some will accept. The negative requires that I answer his material yet not allow him to side-track me into debating other men or affirming a non-existent "GOT" position. I fear he confuses criticism of a public position with persecution (Matt. 5:11).

Observations. Congregational participation under male leadership is our practice in most assemblies and does not contradict elder oversight or allow women equal authority in decision-making. Vance grants women decision-making authority without admitting leadership. Conversely, he speaks of elders having leadership without making decisions. But decision-making is a form of leadership and elders who decide nothing are figureheads and not leaders.

Pattern comments: I do not misrepresent his test of fellowship since he advocates a "pattern" (his book, pp. 24, 26, etc.), and any alternative is "as foreign to the New Testament as is instrumental music" (p. 107, quoting Lynn Trapp). As with music, he has drawn a line. Acts 15 the sole pattern? My affirmative will show passages in addition to Acts 15.

Authority of Elders Comments: If evangelists are to "speak with all authority," but make no decisions, is this true of elders? No, evangelists and elders occupy separate functions and elders are specifically charged to "exercise the oversight" (1 Pet. 5:2). His reference to GT 4/21/94 is a misapplication. The author denied anyone the right to "enact or enforce any other laws than the laws of Christ." I agree. The church is not a democracy but a spiritual body with Christ as its head and the law of Christ is eldership oversight, not consensus! Though not in his proposition, consensus is taught repeatedly in his book and is the heart of this debate. Now he has gone beyond consensus and specifically endorsed church

voting instead of eldership oversight. One person/one vote is a subversion of truth! Every voting person has an absolutely equal voice. Vance denies believing in feminism but a church vote knows no gender, acknowledges no maturity, and respects no submission. Voting changes female participation to female leadership and female majority gives women control of the church. He cannot give women the vote in one breath and deny them leadership with the next. Subjection does not exist in the ballot box. Consensus might include persuasion but voting is raw majority rule, removes women from their subjection to men (1 Tim. 2:11-15), and the congregation from submission to elders (Heb. 13:7, 17). Once the principle of female leadership is introduced, the door cannot be shut. Others will allow co-teaching in Bible classes, women serving the table or preaching.

What A. Campbell said about voting is as irrelevant as what he said about the missionary society and wrong in both cases. The "casting lots" of Acts 1:6 decided nothing but indicated God's choice (1:24). Vance's quote on Acts 15:22 is misleading. Thayer says of "seemed good": "1. To be of opinion, think, suppose...3.b. it seemed good to, pleased, me; I determined" (p. 154). It is also used in Acts 15:28 and his "interpretation" would reduce the Holy Spirit to a vote no greater than that of the youngest female member! Compare its use in Acts 14:23: did Paul and Barnabas "vote" or "appoint" elders? Vine explains that stretching forth the hand "is not to be taken in its literal sense...since it is said of God, Acts 10:41," and adds: "It is also said of those who were appointed (not by voting, but with general approbation)...2 Cor. 8:19" (Vine, p. 69).

Private Decision Comments: Acts 6. He asserted it is "without divine authority" for private decisions to be made without the whole church. But my negative cited seven private decisions of the apostles, and his assertion changes nothing.

Acts 15; Galatians 2. Private meetings with elders and other men took place as specifically stated (Acts 15:2, 6; Gal. 2:2). Decisions were made for the whole church regarding matters of judgment: to accept Paul in fellowship (Gal. 2:9; Acts 9:26-28); spheres of service (Paul to Gentiles; Jerusalem to the Jews); that Titus would not be circumcised (indifferent to God, 1 Cor. 7:19, but with congregational implications, Gal. 2:4-5). So Galatians 2:9 doesn't backfire on me. Elders cannot alter the plan of salvation

(Acts 15:7f), but they can oppose false teachers, support truth and decide in areas of judgment.

1 Corinthians 5 and 6. Congregational action in chapter 5 does not negate the private decisions in chapter 6. There, individual judgmental matters having congregational implications were decided by one or more. Personal disputes should be handled by wise men in the church and not the heathen (6:1). Using hyperbole, Paul asked if there is not even one "among you" (the church, v. 5) who could "judge between his brethren." The wisest in the church ought to be the elders who "judge" (decide) disputed matters between members so that it does not destroy the whole congregation.

Acts 11:27-30. It is understood that the money that came to the needy churches from the messengers, Paul and Barnabas, was sent and received for benevolence. A decision by a receiving eldership to buy a "new meeting tent" would have been sinful. Vance missed the point. The elders, having received the money for benevolence, yet had to make decisions: who was to receive it; how much was each to receive; how long was it to be given, etc.

Male leadership in absence of elders. His syllogism is faulty since he shifts terms from A to B. "Male leadership" is not the same as "men and women in decision-making." He assumed what he failed to prove.

Scandalous Matters, Sensitive Matters. The whole church can be involved in discipline without requiring that every member (babes in Christ, weak in faith, young in age) know the sordid details. Consideration by mature elders is not the same as baring it to those whose faith might be destroyed. "Fornication" before the church is one thing; the shocking evidence that proves fornication is another. Benevolence can also be sensitive. The church should be aware of the needs of brethren without financial disclosure that would discourage and embarrass those in need. A wise eldership can avoid congregational problems by privately dealing with scandalous and sensitive information.

Past questions:

- 1) See material on voting above.
- 2) Since Vance accepts that an "agency" acting is the same as the church acting, he needs to tell us what is wrong with an eldership acting "for, or on behalf of" the congregation. In Acts 6, the seven

men acted "for, or on behalf of" the congregation and it was the same as the congregation caring for the needy saints. In Acts 11:27-30, the eldership received the funds "for, or on behalf of" the congregation and it was the same as the congregation receiving the funds. He accepts agency provided "the congregation has asked an 'agency' to act on its behalf." But God has commanded agency: eldership oversight. Let the reader choose: "Tend to the flock of God which is among you, (*arriving at consensus*), (*counting the ballots*), (*giving women equal authority*) or (*exercising the oversight*)."

3) Vance said "No," that a majority of women cannot rule over a minority of men. But he approves of voting and each vote counts. A majority of women who vote outnumber a minority of men who vote. Why is that not overturning the decision of men? Why is that church not controlled by women?

4) Vance accepts that deacons can "decide the multitudes of decisions" about buying supplies for the church. But why are deacons qualified to make decisions "before and without calling together the whole congregation" and elders are not? If deacons are "appointed" (Acts 6:2) and elders are "appointed" (Acts 14:23), why are deacons empowered to make decisions, and elders not empowered? The qualifications relate each to the work to be done.

6) Vance described a stalemate in consensus when "leaders disagree with the multitude." Exactly! Every collectively must have a mechanism for avoiding stalemates. In a democracy, voting provides it; in the home, it is husbands (Eph. 5:23); in the church, elders are appointed to make decisions for the collectivity.

Vance's Questions:

1) A "rump meeting" of a few rebels is an unauthorized meeting and violates 1 Pet. 5:5b, among others. Elderships have authorized meetings (1 Pet. 5:2).

2) Jesus has been given "all authority" (Matt. 28:18) and as law-giver has ordained elders be appointed to "oversee" and "shepherd" the collectivity. Vance understands this with deacons but objects to it with elders.

3) Yes.

4) I did not concede that women are authorized to attend business meetings. Acts 6, etc., authorizes congregational meetings in which women are present under male leadership. In these assemblies,

women may participate short of assuming decision-making authority. God has placed women in subjection under men (1 Tim. 2:11-15) but Vance's voting would make them equal. Men do not prohibit women from doing any authorized activity.

Questions for Vance:

1) What passages permit deacons the right to make decisions on behalf of the congregation but prohibit elders from making decisions?

2) How can a woman vote her conscience yet remain in subjection when she disagrees with her husband and the elders?

3) Does voting give women leadership authority?

4) Can a woman co-teach a Bible class in the church so long as she is under subjection to her male co-teacher?

Third Affirmative

Vance E. Trefethen

Fellowship. Had I wanted to debate fellowship, I would have put it in the proposition.

Leadership & Authority. The argument that leadership requires private decision-making for others is wrong. Many leaders (e.g. evangelists, Bible class teachers) don't privately decide collective activity. Negative assumes leaders privately decide everything, and since elders are leaders, they must be an exception to the pattern of including the whole church. He must prove this assumption. He has already denied it by granting that spiritual leadership doesn't necessarily infer private decision-making in collective judgment (Titus 2:15).

We agree elders have "authority," but no scripture uses "authority" directly with "elders"--their authority has to be inferred from definitions of other words used of elders. The closest Negative comes is Matt 28:18. But consider: "And they [elders] have no *arbitrary authority*. Christ has all authority (Mt 28:18), and that does not leave any for the elders." (Luther Blackmon, *Truth Magazine*, 10/27/77, p. 13, Mike Willis, ed.).

- 1) The "authority" of that verse was given to Jesus, not elders.
- 2) Jesus doesn't decide matters of judgment for churches today. Matt 28:18 is about matters of faith.
- 3) His own paper says Matt 28:18 prohibits elders from arbitrary authority.

Look again at the Negative position:

1. GT says elders cannot enact or enforce any other laws than the laws of Christ.
2. Negative says "oversight" means authority to bind things on the church.
- 3(?). Therefore, elders can indeed enact and enforce other laws on the church. The law of Christ says they can't, and then it says they can. The problem is a bad definition of "oversight."

Oversight. Negative's argument that oversight and collective agreement are mutually exclusive is wrong. We agree elders have

oversight. We differ on what it means. He couldn't answer my challenge for a lexical definition. It means: "to look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for" (Thayer, p. 242). "Privately decide matters of judgment" is not the meaning.

Heb 12:14-16 contains an inspired definition and commentary: "Follow after peace with all men...looking carefully [*episkopeo*] lest there be any man that falleth short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you...lest there be any fornicator, or profane person..." *Episkopeo* applies, in some sense, to all Christians, not just elders. Every saint would decide things for all other saints if *episkopeo* means private decision-making! "Oversight" means watching for the spiritual well-being of others and helping them with spiritual problems. Compare evangelism: Every Christian has some degree of responsibility to teach others the gospel, but not every Christian is an "evangelist" (Eph 4:11). The "looking carefully" (*episkopeo*) done by every saint is much smaller in scope than the burden assigned to elders, but the meaning of *episkopeo* is consistent. It takes special qualifications to "care for" the spiritual needs of the entire flock. But every saint must, to some degree, help other saints with spiritual needs. That's *episkopeo*, in the lexicon and the Bible.

Consider "the Shepherd and Bishop [overseer, *episkope*] of your souls" (1 Pet 2:25). We agree that matters of judgment are things humans decide. *Episkopeo* cannot mean "privately decide matters of judgment for the church," else Jesus violates it by failing to make such decisions. Jesus decides matters of faith because he is "Lord" and "head of the church." He "oversees" (cares for, watches over, looks after) the universal church by giving spiritual help we need as we obey matters of faith. Elders perform a similar role in local churches, along with other functions covered by other words besides "oversight" in the NT.

Vine, Voting & Consensus. Negative quoted Vine on *cheirotoneo* but left out the primary definition: "primarily used of voting in the Athenian legislative assembly." Later, Vine says it's used of "those who were appointed (not by voting, but with general approbation)...2 Cor. 8:19." Approbation means "approval" (WCD, p. 53). It's confusing--it means "vote," then it doesn't. The solution: "vote" includes any expression of opinion in a group to arrive at collective agreement. This harmonizes with Vine and with 1 Cor

1:10, 2 Cor 8:19, and Acts 15:25.

No Negative response to my passages teaching general agreement in matters of judgment. And note:

1. Consensus means "general agreement" (TR's dictionary, 1N).
2. *Cheirotoneo* means "general approbation" and occurred in 2 Cor 8:19 (TR quoting Vine).

3. Therefore: We (along with A. Campbell) agree that "voting" in the NT is the expression of opinion by the multitude to obtain "general approbation," not a "51% wins/49% loses" scenario.

Heb 13:7,17. The words "elder," "pastor," "bishop" are not in Heb. 13. The Greek word for "rule" is *hegeomai*, which means "leader" (NASV). It referred to the "chief men" Judas and Silas (Acts 15:22) and to Paul's relationship with Barnabas ("the chief speaker," Acts 14:12). In Heb 13 it refers to those who "spoke the word of God" and whose faith (not judgments) should be imitated. "Obey" refers to matters of faith and God's word, not matters of judgment. If this passage were about decision-making, it would authorize all "leaders" to privately decide things (because *hegeomai* isn't limited to elders). I know Tom doesn't believe that. By the way, the word "watch" in Heb 13:17 is not *episkopeo*, but a totally different Greek word (and it doesn't mean "privately decide things for the church" either!).

Acts 6. No response to the consequences of asserting that elders decide whether women can be leaders and the qualifications of deacons. If elders today may decide whether women can be leaders (1N ¶5), who's opening the door to radical feminism?

He said "Yes" when asked if the whole church can be included under male leadership, and cited Acts 6 (1A Q. 1). This answer is wrong if the whole church was not "included." If we can obey Acts 6 without the multitude, we can also obey Acts 20:7 and break bread on Tuesday.

Acts 15:22. There is some confusion here because 2 Greek words have gotten mixed together. The word in Acts 15 (*dokeo* is the root) is different from 2 Cor 8:19 (*cheirotoneo*). Negative's disagreement with my scholar doesn't make the scholar "misleading." Let's accept that the Apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided ["determined," TR quoting Thayer] to send chosen men (Acts 15:22). The Bible and both of our scholars say it. Let's humbly obey.

Acts 15:6-7. We agree this passage is about salvation, not matters of judgment (2N ¶7).

Gal 2:9. 1) No Negative response to the problem of 3 out of 14 leaders making decisions for the church. 2) No Negative response to the fact that this passage is about fellowship in preaching the gospel and individual efforts by evangelists. 3) No evidence showing changes in collective action by the Jerusalem church after this alleged "decision" was made for them.

Gal 2:2. No Negative reply to this being about "the gospel," not congregational judgment.

Gal 2:3. 1) Individuals decide personal matters of conscience (Rom 14:12-13, 22). They might seek help from spiritual leaders, but this is individual action, not collective decision. 2) Do elders decide whether each member of the church should be circumcised? This is frightening.

1 Cor 5. Negative's "scandal" comments (2N ¶11) are interesting, but he gave no scriptures. Individual investigation and rebuke are taught in Gal 6:1, e.g. But we agree 1 Cor 5 shows "congregational action" (2N ¶8) by "ye gathered together" (1 Cor 5:4), which settles the matter.

1 Cor 6. Paul could have limited the wise judge to elders, had God said so. In that case, members of a church without elders couldn't obey this passage--they'd just have to sue one another. If "one wise man" cannot be the judge, Paul was wrong for saying he could. We either have one man judging a private dispute, or one man privately deciding collective action without the other elders or men. There was no Negative reply to this. In Matt 18, 2 or 3 "witnesses" (not "elders-only") meet with two brethren. Do 2 or 3 non-elders decide things for the church? No, they privately solve a private matter. 1 Cor 6 and the first 2 steps of Matt 18 are individual actions, not collective judgments.

Acts 11:27-30. I'll ask again: Where in Acts 11 did elders decide things without including the congregation? Book, chapter, verse? If it isn't necessarily inferred that Paul & Barnabas privately made decisions by handling money, why is it necessarily inferred for elders?

Without elders. No passage has been introduced in this exchange showing a men's business meeting in any NT church without elders. We agree men's business meetings cannot

scripturally substitute for elders (1A Q. 6). We agree a church can "decide a matter of judgment by including the whole church under male leadership" (1A Q. 1). A decision by a few members is a "rump meeting" (GT) of "rebels" (TR) and violates 1 Pet 5:5 (2A Q. 1). We also agree:

1. "Acts 6, etc., authorizes congregational meetings in which women are present." (TR, 2N ¶13).

2. "Men do not prohibit women from doing any authorized activity." (TR, 2N ¶13).

3. Therefore: We must agree that a small business meeting is unauthorized (violates 1 Pet 5:5 and prohibits women from an authorized activity) and a congregational assembly under male leadership is authorized in a church without elders. This is the pattern I affirm.

With elders. 2A Q. 3: "When elders include the whole church in decision-making, do they lose 'authority' or 'oversight'?" 2N answer: "Yes." Elders "lose oversight" if they ever include the whole church! They included them in Acts 15:22. But they never can under Negative's view. Are you ready for that conclusion?

Acting by agency. The 7 men in Acts 6 acted "by agency" after being authorized by "the multitude." I'm baffled how Negative can argue these men acted without the multitude in light of Acts 6:2. Men claiming to act for the church without "general approbation" (TR) are "rebels" (TR).

Now there's a new definition of "oversight": "*God has commanded agency: eldership oversight*" (2N ¶12). Try "an agency deciding matters of judgment for a local church" for *episkopeo* in Heb 12:15 and 1 Pet 2:25. This new definition destroys these passages.

2N Questions.

1) I don't affirm that deacons decide collective matters without including the church.

2) The same way she does when she disagrees with a male Bible class teacher. She meekly expresses her opinion for the group to consider. She can't override or complain against her husband or the male leaders. In matters of judgment, the whole church, guided by male leaders, should find a solution all can go along with (1 Cor 1:10, Acts 15:25).

3) No.

4) No.

Dictatorship, Democracy, and the NT. In a dictatorship, a few decide things and bind them on the multitude, claiming that including the many would destroy their "authority." In a democracy, 51% get their way and the losers go home mad, vowing to come back and win next time. In the NT, the leaders call the multitude, explain the problem and offer solutions. When the whole congregation comes to "one accord" (Acts 15:25), with "the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10), everyone goes home happy and the Lord is pleased.

Conclusion. We agree on the 4 cases I cited, and we've found one more (2 Cor 8:19) showing the inclusion of the whole church. The exceptions failed, either by being inconsistent with Negative's own position or by referring to individual rather than collective action. Please join me in affirming that we should follow the pattern of including the whole church.

Third Negative

Tom Roberts

The responsibility of the negative in a debate is to follow the affirmative and answer his arguments. I have done this and Vance's proposition has failed. My three affirmatives will follow in a privately printed book which can be obtained from GOT.

Fellowship: Vance labels as sinful the practice of elders making decisions. Will he fellowship what he considers sinful? His views will divide brethren in local churches.

Leadership & Authority: Collectivities (congregations, families, etc.) require decision-making to reach a common mind, whether by elders or church votes. Leadership and authority are inherent in decisions. Evangelists and Bible class teachers have no authority but elders do (1 Pet. 5:3). This oversight includes private decision-making (Acts 6, 11, 15, etc.). I refuse to debate Luther Blackmon or any other than Vance. But if Christ has "all authority" (Matt. 28:18) without delegating any, explain why resisting authorities (magistrates, fathers, husbands, elders) is to resist God (Rom. 13:1-5; Eph. 6:4; 5:22; Acts 14:23).

Oversight: Voting is leadership authority or minorities and women would not insist on their right to vote. Vance avoided the consequences of my questions re: women voting. A vote is an absolute expression of authority that knows no gender and respects no higher authority; there is no "submissive" vote and does not "meekly express an opinion for the group to consider." **Even more than consensus, voting opens the door to female equality in decision-making.** A 13-year old Christian girl would have the same power in voting as elders (20:28). The lexical definition he seeks: Bishop, overseer (episkopos), 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:7: "An overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, ..." (Thayer, p. 243). Jesus is Overseer, elders are overseers and it means the same in both cases (1 Pet 2:25; 5:3). Vance says Jesus as Overseer can make decisions but elders as overseers cannot make decisions. We do not agree on oversight; it clearly permits decision-making.

Vine, Voting and Consensus: Vine on voting (cheirotoneo, p. 69) is not confusing. Noting the primary meaning, he states that it is "not to be taken in its literal sense" (cf: Acts 10:41; 14:23; 2 Cor. 8:19). "Dokeo" (Vine, p. 340) does not support voting (Acts 15:22, 28). Vance's "authority" (The Interpreter's Bible) is a commentary, not a lexicon, that likewise says Paul is "less than Christian" (Vol. 10, p. 126) in his view on women (1 Cor. 11:2-16)! Is that scholarship? "General agreement in matters of judgment" is not guaranteed by consensus or voting. Either the voting majority decides the issue (51% wins - 49% loses) or chaos results. God's way is to have qualified elders who conclude the discussion. Congregational meetings (Acts 6, 15, etc.) do not negate private decision-making in those same passages any more than faith in Mk. 16:16 negates baptism. But voting and elder oversight are mutually exclusive.

Heb. 13:7, 17: Are there "chief men" like Judas and Silas today? If so, what are their qualifications? If those of Hebrews 13 were considered "chief" because they "spoke the word of God," would this not authorize evangelistic oversight? Vance wants us to "obey" and "submit" to "chief men" (with no stated qualifications) but rejects "obeying" and "submitting" to elders who have stated qualifications (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1). Vance assumed "obey" referred to matters of "the faith" and not "judgment." If "*hegeomai* isn't limited to elders," could we agree that *hegeomai* applies to elders at all? Is it scriptural to submit to and obey elders?

Acts 6: Vance knew that I did not believe elders can decide matters of faith and cannot appoint women to be leaders. Radical feminism will never trouble the church which accepts scriptural elders but it will when matters are decided by the vote! Vance has opened the door to female leadership. Decisions were made in Acts 6 before and without calling the congregation together (the apostles selected 7 men, not 6 or 8, surely a matter of judgment). If you want to use this to take the Lord's supper on Tuesday, it will be your decision, not mine.

Acts 15:22: Galatians 2 with Acts 15 shows that there were private decision meetings with the apostles and elders that did not include the whole church. Acts 16:4 states that the decrees were "determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem." These facts destroy Vance's proposition. Private decisions by elders are authorized by the word of God.

First Debate: Third Negative

Acts 15:6-7: Not all matters of Acts 15 referred to matters of salvation; some included items of judgment. Refer to my previous negative. We do not agree and our difference is clear.

Gal. 2:2-9: Consideration of my previous negative material will prove that I responded to Vance's material. Not all decisions of Acts 15 and Galatians 2 were matters of faith. Titus' circumcision, a religious liberty (Gal. 5:6), affected the whole church and a private decision was made not to circumcise. Private decisions on matters of liberty are authorized.

1 Cor. 5: Vance's inexperience fails to realize that scandalous matters can destroy the faith of the weak and babes and they should be protected (Rom. 15:1; 1 Cor. 8:7, 9-12). While sin must be dealt with in the congregation, the lurid details must be contained by mature brethren.

1 Cor. 6: How can this passage be an individual matter since verse one suggests going to law (court) before "saints" and was addressed to the church? Paul used hyperbole (v. 5) to emphasize "is there not a wise man among you, not even one" (more than one is implied) who could settle the dispute. The decision affected the whole church in that the "wise men" acted on behalf of the church to keep the matter out of Gentile courts. The last step of Matthew 18 could be handled identically to 1 Cor. 6:1 after the first two steps are handled individually. The congregation can be represented by agency (2 Cor. 8:23), either by messengers or by wise men who settle disputes for the church. Authorized agency action is church action.

Acts 11:27-30: I'll state it again: since the elders received the money, they had to distribute it. Decisions necessarily inferred: who are needy? how much do they need? how long will they need it? The elders had to make these decisions. As messengers, Paul & Barnabas could make no decision but to deliver it to the elders who accepted the responsibility of oversight.

Without elders: Vance may affirm a pattern of a congregational consensus under male leadership all he wants to, but when he advocated the vote he abandoned male leadership for feminine equality. We have congregational meetings every week in which women participate in authorized activities (singing, praying, etc.), none prohibiting them. But it does not follow that women are authorized in business meetings to cast equal votes any more than they are authorized to preach. 1 Peter 5:5 must not be arrayed

against 1 Timothy 2:12 nor 1 Pet. 5:2. If "being submissive" (1 Pet. 5:5) means women in business meetings with equal votes, it also means women in the pulpit. Apostasy will not stop with voting and Vance has opened the gate!

With Elders: The KJV & NKJV states: "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men...." (Acts 15:22). It is clear that a congregational meeting took place in Acts 15, but equally clear that private meetings took place in which decisions of judgment were reached. Vance's error creates an eldership figurehead that makes no decisions while voting (including women) decides everything for the congregation. This is oversight?

Acting by agency: Though it "baffles" Vance, when the 7 men of Acts 6 took care of the widows, the church acted through them. This is corporate action by agency: deacons at work, preachers at work, elders at work. Must every member visit every widow or can the church act through the deacons? Must the whole church be involved in every decision or does the church act through the elders (Acts 11:30)? Elders are authorized to exercise oversight even as Christ and the apostles exercised oversight (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 2:25; 2 Cor. 5:20). Not all oversight is of the type elders have (Heb. 12:15), but elder oversight includes acting for the church.

Vance's Questions:

1) Vance did imply that deacons made decisions when he answered my question 1N #5: "the church gathered and chose servants (diakoneo) to do that in Acts 6." Deacons may decide (without a congregational meeting) how many loaves of bread to buy. If deacons can make judgment decisions without consulting the congregation, so can the elders.

2) A woman voting her conscience is not "meekly expressing her opinion." A vote is a decision equal to that of a man (a violation of 1 Tim. 2:11-12). A woman is not in subjection while voting; her vote nullifies her husband's or another male's vote.

3) Vance doesn't understand authority if he thinks voting doesn't give a woman authority. He has opened Pandora's box for the feminists.

4) Vance's position on voting gives women leadership authority. It is inconsistent of him to deny them leadership in teaching or public worship.

Dictatorship, Democracy, and the NT: The whole church can come to "one accord" (Acts 15:25; 1 Cor. 1:10) under eldership oversight and godly submission (Heb. 13:7, 17); the expressed will of God (1 Pet. 5:3). Consensus and voting is human wisdom. God's way works.

Conclusion: Vance's proposition has not been sustained; we don't agree. On the other hand, we have proven beyond doubt that private decisions by males (apostles, elders) were reached without the congregation being present. Eldership oversight that permits private decisions in matters of judgment is scriptural. Consensus brings confusion. "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" Rom. 14:19). My affirmative arguments which follow will sustain eldership oversight.

First Affirmative

Tom M. Roberts

Proposition: "Resolved: The scriptures teach that the elders of a local church are authorized to assemble privately to make decisions in matters of judgment for the local church before and without calling together the whole congregation."

Definitions: "*The scriptures,*" the 66 books of the Bible. "*Teach,*" instruct by commands, approved examples or divine implications. "*Elders,*" men who are scripturally authorized and appointed (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1) over each local church (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:2). "*Local church,*" the congregation in a given locality in its corporate entity (Phil. 1:1). "*Authorized,*" empowered, permitted. "*To assemble,*" meet in their eldership capacity (Acts 20:17). "*Privately,*" (Gk: *idios*) "pertaining to one's own; to do one's own business (1 Thes. 4:11), apart (Mt. 24:3)" (Thayer, p. 296-7). "*To make decisions,*" come to a conclusion. "*In matters of judgment,*" distinct from matters of faith. "*For the local church,*" represent, act on behalf of, in the interest of the local congregation. "*Before,*" in advance of. "*And without,*" lacking, in the absence of. "*Calling together,*" summoning, requesting. "*The whole congregation,*" the *ekklesia*.

This debate is not about: 1) An abuse of that which is scriptural. Abuse of civil government does not mitigate against authorized government (Rom. 13:1-7); abuse by husbands does not mitigate against headship (Eph. 5:23); "lording it over God's heritage" does not mitigate against oversight (Mt. 20:25-27; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). 2) Excluding the congregation from the decision-making process. While elders make final decisions as overseers, they seek advice and counsel from the congregation. 3) Excluding women since "congregation" includes women.

This debate is about: The error propagated by Vance in his book, *Confusion or Consensus*, which includes: 1) Charging elders with sin when they make a private decision for the church (p. 47, 51), 2) A demand that women be included in congregational decision-making (p. 3), 3) A claim for a pattern that demands congregational decision-making in every instance even when there

Second Debate: First Affirmative

are elders (p. 44), 4) Substitution of consensus for oversight of elders (p. 24), 5) Voting instead of elder oversight (his aff. #2). These errors violate the clear NT teaching of eldership oversight which permits them to make decisions on behalf of the congregation. The proposition which I affirm will be supported by three major arguments. The first will be a word study of the Biblical language from which we perceive the authority of elders.

Arguments: Words are vehicles of thoughts and inspiration has chosen the exact words to explain the scope of the elders' authority, the congregation's relationship to elders, and woman's subjection. "*Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words*" (1 Cor. 2:13). When one is a "bishop" and exercises "oversight," he is and does expressly what the Holy Spirit teaches. Divine concepts ("spiritual things") are expressed through divine precepts ("spiritual words"). Human concepts (congregational decision-making) are expressed through human precepts (consensus, voting) and constitute "human wisdom."

Word Study: 1) Elder, presbyter (presbuteros), Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5: "(3) in the Christian churches, those who, being raised up and qualified by the work of the Holy Spirit, were appointed to have the spiritual care of, and to exercise oversight over, the churches" (Vine, Vol. II, p. 21). 2) Bishop, overseer (episkopos), 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7: "An overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent...spec. the superintendent, head or overseer of any Christian church" (Thayer, p. 243). "Lit, an overseer...2)...is rendered... 'office of a bishop,' lit. 'overseership,' there is no word representing office. Note: The corresponding verb is *episkopeo*, which, in reference to the work of an overseer, is found in I Pet. 5:2.. 'exercising the oversight..taking the oversight'" Vine's, p. 129. 3) Pastors, shepherds (poimenas): "a shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks (not merely one who feeds them), is used metaphorically of Christian 'pastors,' Eph. 4:11. Pastors guide as well as feed the flock; cp. Acts 20:28, which, with v. 17, indicates that this was the service committed to elders (overseers, bishops); so in I Pet. 5:1-2, 'tend the flock, exercising the oversight;' this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence" (Vine, p. 167). Also 4) Feed (verb, *poimaino*), Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2:

"to act as a shepherd," (quoting Trench) "The tending (which includes this) consists of other acts, of discipline, authority, restoration, material assistance of individuals, but they are incidental in comparison with the feeding" (Vine, p. 87, 88). 5) Appoint (*kathistami*): "prop. to set down, put down...(a) to set one over a thing (in charge of it), Acts 6:3...(b) to appoint one to administer an office, Tit. 1:5" (Thayer, p. 314). Compare its usage: Mt. 24:45, 47; Acts 6:3; Tit. 1:5. 6) Rule (*proistemi*), 1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4; 5:17: "to set or place before; to set over. a. To be over, to superintend, preside over, rule," (Thayer, p. 539); (*hegeomai*), Heb. 13:7, 17: "to lead, is translated to rule" (Vine, p.307).

These words clearly define that elders have the authority of God to oversee, exercise the oversight, see that things are done rightly by others, to be set over, to be a leader, to rule. There is no ambiguity here. It is inconceivable that elder oversight excludes the ability to make even one decision, much less that they sin by doing so. The Holy Spirit "makes" bishops (Acts 20:28) by the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and defines their authority by these words that describe them. It is ludicrous to use the terminology without applying the definitions. To admit oversight and superintendency is not to stretch a single word from its meaning or context. This is what elders are and what they do, not in name only. To strip elders of decision-making ability is to deny elders what they do by definition: "exercise the oversight." It is notable that the same word "appoint" used in Acts 6:3 authorizing "deacons" to decide about tables is also used in Titus 1:5 regarding elders. Are deacons permitted to do that which is forbidden to elders: make decisions about their work? Elders are not to "lord it over the flock," nor act as Gentile masters, but there is legitimate oversight (else words have no meaning), not to be confused with abuse (1 Pet. 5:3; Lk. 22:25-26). As a father rules his house, so an elder rules the "house of God" (1 Tim. 3:4-5). Must a father rule by consensus or by majority vote without the ability to make a single decision without the whole family, including the children, being in agreement? In any collective (whether a family or a congregation), information may be sought from every member by the overseer, but someone must make a final decision. In the family, this is the father (Eph. 5:23). In the church, these are

5:22-23; Rom. 13:1-2)?

2) Do bishops have the right to make decisions relating to the oversight of the church (1 Pet. 5:1-3)?

3) Do elders "lord it over God's heritage" every time they make a decision for the congregation (1 Pet. 5:3; Mt. 20:25)?

4) If so, why is a woman not having "authority over a man" (1 Tim. 2:12) when she exercises decision-making authority in the church?

5) Do you believe an eldership should be removed from a congregation when it makes private decisions for the church?

elders. Vance denies this to elders. Would he also deny it to fathers?

Word Study: Congregation's role toward elders: *Submit (hupeiko)*: "To resist no longer, to give way, yield, metaph. to yield to authority and admonition, to submit, Heb. 13:17" (Thayer, p. 638). *Obey (peitho)*: "1. To persuade, i.e. to induce one by words to believe;...2.a. to be persuaded, to suffer one's self to be persuaded...b. to listen to, obey, yield to, comply with, Acts 5:36-39; Acts 23:21; 27:11; Ro. 2:8; Gal. 3:1; 5:1; Heb. 13:17; Jas. 3:3" (Thayer, p. 497). *Study the cited scriptures carefully.* Elders cannot be excluded from this work since it applies to those who are to "rule" over the church and elders are specifically charged with this duty. They are the only *scripturally qualified* men so charged.

Word study: Woman's subjection (hupotage), 1 Tim. 2:11: "1. the act of subjecting, 2. obedience, subjection, to arrange under, to subordinate, to subject, put in subjection" (Thayer, p. 645). Vance must make up his mind whether women have decision-making authority or not. In those congregations with a majority of women, the men must either submit to the authority of the women or override their decision-making authority. If elders are present, they must defer to the women if the women decide to go against the judgment of the elders. If this is not true, women have no decision-making authority. The Bible requires women to be in subjection; Vance requires them to have decision-making authority. If "being in subjection" allows decision-making authority, why would not "being in subjection" also allow women to serve the Lord's table, preach, or teach mixed adult classes so long as they did so "under male leadership?"

Summary: The words of the Holy Spirit define an elder and his authority. There is no need to stretch these words beyond their legitimate definitions to determine that elders can make a private decision that is binding on the church. The church is not a democracy that empowers itself to make corporate decisions (consensus) but a theocracy that has a mandate from Christ as head to submit in judgment matters to the qualified elders who are "over" them "in the Lord."

Questions:

1) Do parents, husbands and magistrates have the right to make decisions relating to the oversight of their province (Eph. 6:4:1-4;

First Negative

Vance E. Trefethen

Introduction. As before, my articles represent my own views and not those of any church, eldership, or other saints. Quotes from Tom's material are italicized, as are Greek words.

The Problem. Many are stuck between the false choice that elders either privately decide all matters of judgment, or else they have no authority or function at all. Since the latter is wrong, many are driven to the former. But there is a third way--the Bible way. In the Bible, elders perform authoritative spiritual leadership by calling and presiding over assemblies, teaching the flock, rebuking sinners, convicting false teachers, correcting the erring, counseling, visiting and lifting up the weak, leading in prayer, admonishing (warning), and showing less mature saints how to get to heaven. Both of the extremes described above have bad consequences. The first ("elders privately decide everything") led to many of the disastrous consequences of the Boston Movement. The latter ("elders are just older saints with no leadership authority") is associated with a breakdown of the meaning and purpose of the local church. The Affirmative position accepts the first extreme in its zeal to avoid the second. The Negative denies both extremes in favor of the Bible pattern.

Definitions. I challenge the Aff. definition of "assemble," because 1) It's not in any dictionary; and 2) It assumes something under debate: what "eldership capacity" means. I agree that elders (and teenagers, preachers, women, etc.) may meet privately. The question is, can private groups decide things for the church without ever including the whole congregation?

More definitions. "Lord" -- *katakurieuo* (1 Pet 5:3; Mat 20:25), "control, subjugate:--exercise dominion over" (Strong, p. 40). "Lord" -- *kurios* (1 Pet 3:6), "supreme in authority, i.e. (as noun) controller" (Strong, p. 44). "Authority" -- *katexousiazō* (Mat 20:25), "to have (wield) full privilege over" (Strong, p. 41). "Leader" -- *hegeomai* (Heb 13:7,17 NASV), "chief" (Lk 22:26; Acts 15:22). "Necessary" -- "resulting from necessity; inevitable" (Web. Coll. Dic. 5th ed., p. 664).

What the debate is not about. *"Excluding the congregation from the decision-making process."* Really? But the proposition says "before and without" the congregation. Exclude means "to shut out" (Merr.-Web. Dic. p. 250). This debate is already over and conceded to the Negative if we agree the congregation cannot be shut out of the decision-making process.

What the debate is about. My book? No, it's about the proposition Tom agreed to affirm. The key to this debate is whether "privately deciding all collective judgments" is the necessary inference from words describing the work of elders, or whether there are other inferences required by Greek grammar, context, and the use of these words in other passages.

Word Study. 1) Elder, presbyter (*presbuteros*). I agree with Tom's quote of Vine on this word—more so than Tom does. Vine says "spiritual care of" the church is the oversight they carry out. That's exactly what I believe. But affirmative wants "spiritual care" to be changed into privately deciding all matters of judgment.

2) Bishop, overseer (*episkopos*). Tom should have quoted Vine on "oversight" (*episkopeo*) to show what overseers do: "to look upon (*epi*, upon, *skopeo*, to look at, contemplate)..." The rest of Vine's comments do not pertain to the definition until he reaches Heb 12:15, where it means "looking carefully" (Vine, p. 152). Secret decision-making is conspicuously absent from Vine's definition of "oversight."

I hope Tom doesn't believe his quote defining a bishop as head of any Christian church. Bishops who see that things done by others are done "rightly" (as opposed to "wrongly") are leading people in matters of faith, not privately deciding matters of judgment. When something is a matter of "right" and "wrong" it is not a collective judgment. Thayer's definition shows the work of elders in matters of faith and says nothing about deciding matters of judgment.

3) Pastor, shepherd (*poimenas*). The definition of "pastor" as a "shepherd" is fine. God (not commentators like Trench) decides the work of shepherds, since He owns the flock. Eph 4:11-13 defines the work: "He gave some...pastors...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith..." Pastors are for the unity of the faith. The definition of "matters of judgment"

("distinct from matters of faith") means the word "pastor" has no application to this proposition.

4) **Feed** (*poimaino*). Vine's definition of *poimaino* is "to act as a shepherd." Ezek 34:2-3 is an inspired commentary on shepherds' work: feed the sheep, strengthen the weak, bind up the sick, heal the injured, bring back the strays, search for the lost. Pastors make the difference between sheep being "lost," "injured," or "weak" and being saved, healthy and strong. This is leadership in matters of faith, not secret decisions in matters of judgment. No one is "lost" over matters of judgment, and the feeding done by shepherds is in matters of faith (Eph 4:11-13).

5) **Appoint** (*kathistami*). This word pertains only to how leaders are placed "in office," and does not explain what kind of authority they have thereafter.

6) **Rule** (*proistemi*). 1) I'm disappointed at the incomplete quote from Vine on this word. Here's the full quote: "PROISTEMI (ΠΡΟΙΣΤΗΜΙ), lit., 'to stand before,' hence, to lead, attend to (indicating care and diligence), is translated to rule (Middle Voice), with reference to a local church, in Rom. 12:8; perfect Active in 1 Tim 5:17; with reference to a family, 1 Tim. 3:4 and 12 (Middle Voice); ver. 5 (2nd aorist, Active). See MAINTAIN." (Vine, p. 307) "Lead," "attend to," and "care and diligence" explain what "rule" means, and also contradict the Aff. position, which is why they were omitted. These are consistent with the work of elders being to lead, help, and "maintain" others in "the faith" (Eph 4:11-13). 2) If *proistemi* means "privately decide all matters of judgment," then all saints should privately decide everything because *proistemi* applies to all Christians in Titus 3:14. "Privately decide everything for the church" cannot be necessarily inferred from *proistemi*. Since it's not in the lexicon, it shouldn't be inferred at all.

Fathers & Elders. No, elders do not rule (attend to, care for, lead) a church exactly as fathers do a family. There is a similarity in some aspects (*proistemi*), but there are two other words that sharply distinguish them: "head" and "lord." The husband is "head" over his family (Eph 5:23). Elders aren't "head" of the church, and I call on Tom to retract this doctrine. The word "lord" applies to the husband's relationship to his wife (1 Pet

3:6. Do you still believe I'm a radical feminist?). Heads and lords can privately decide things and bind them on others. Both are granted to fathers and forbidden to elders.

Submit & Obey, Heb 13:7,17. 1) Elders are not the "*only scripturally qualified men*" who are "leaders" (*hegeomai*). In Lk 22:26 it refers to the Apostles and any others who might be considered "chief" among brethren. In Acts 15:22 *hegeomai* distinguishes Judas and Silas from the "apostles and elders." In Acts 14:12 it refers to a man disqualified from the eldership. 2) God's definition of *hegeomai* in the church is "those who spoke the word of God to you" (Heb 13:7), "leading in speech" (Acts 14:12, New Eng. Gk. Conc. & Lexicon, p. 379). *Hegeomai* in the church are those who publically teach and admonish from the Word. Elders are among *hegeomai*, since they must teach the Word, but *episkopeo* and *presbuteros* are not synonyms for *hegeomai*, and not all *hegeomai* are elders. Elders are not mentioned anywhere in Heb 13. Assuming elders are the sole *hegeomai* of Heb 13 is an unnecessary inference. Judas-Barsabbas, Silas, and Paul are overlooked in this erroneous assumption. 3) Even if this were about elders-only, it defeats the proposition. His definition of obey is yielding to persuasion, but the proposition says "before and without" the congregation. There is no persuasion when things are done privately without the congregation. 4) The only matters mentioned in context are "the word of God," "imitate their faith," and "strange teachings;" (Heb 13:7-9). The Word, faith, and strange teachings are not matters of judgment.

Woman's subjection (*hupotage*) 1 Tim 2:11. This passage says nothing about anyone deciding things before and without the assembly. In singing, Bible class, and the Lord's Supper, women participate under male leadership. If women might attempt leadership in these things, the solution isn't to ban women from participating. Why is that the only solution Tom has for reaching "one accord" (Acts 15:25) in matters of judgment? Violating NT examples (Acts 6:5; 15:22) is never the solution to anything.

Circular reasoning. How do we know *episkopeo* means privately decide everything? Because it's used of elders. How do we know elders should privately decide everything? Because *episkopeo* applies to them. The preconceived idea proves the preconceived definition, which proves the preconceived idea. But

notice: 1) *Episkopeo* is used of non-elders (Acts 1:20; Heb 12:15) and therefore gives others private decision-making authority, if that's what it infers; 2) No lexicon defines it as "privately decide all matters of judgment."

Confusion on authority. Aff. wrongly assumes two things are equal because they have something in common. Example: Elders and fathers have something in common (*proistemi*), so all their authority is the same. Here's the flaw: A policeman can rebuke and punish my daughter if he finds her speeding. As her father, I have similar authority. Do I therefore have all the same authority as a policeman? No. I can't arrest people, drive a police car, etc. We have one type of authority in common, but many others are forbidden. So with bishops and fathers.

Answers. 1) *Episkopeo* (oversight) isn't in the passages cited. Rephrase the question using Bible words in Bible ways and I'll answer it. 2) Do you mean elders have the same authority as fathers and governments? Headship? Using the sword? How far will this go? *Episkopeo* doesn't necessarily infer deciding matters of judgment for others (Heb 12:14-15). If you affirm it does, you must prove it. 3) Only if they do so in matters of collective judgment before and without including the congregation. 4) Because she isn't overruling or leading the males, nor is she deciding things "for" the church. The whole group together reaches "general approbation" (2 Cor 8:19), as your scholar said. 5) No. Nor should a preacher quit if he learns he was wrong about something he taught. He should just do things differently in the future.

Questions.

1) Do *episkopeo* and *proistemi* inevitably infer private decision-making?

2) Do elders wield full privilege (have total control) over decision-making?

3) Give a lexicon and a scripture defining *hegeomai* as "elders-only."

4) Does obeying the *hegeomai* of Heb 13 apply to individual or collective action, matters of faith or judgment, or what combination of the above?

5) Do the kings in Mat 20:25 and Lk 22:26 rule by privately deciding things for the people?

Summary. Please join me in rejecting the proposition because:

Second Debate: First Negative

1. It gives elders headship and lordship over the church.
2. It demands unnecessary and contradictory inferences from the scriptures.
3. It changes the lexical definitions of Bible words.
4. It ignores Apostolic examples of congregational decision-making (Acts 15:22).
5. It confuses matters of faith with matters of judgment.

Second Affirmative

Tom Roberts

My first affirmative showed that the definitions of scriptural terms (bishops, elders, etc.) permitted elders to "exercise the oversight" (1 Pet. 5:3), thereby empowering them to make private decisions on behalf of the congregation. Now we will prove in a scripture study that elders actually did make decisions "before and without" calling together the whole congregation.

Arguments: 1) Acts 4:34-37. From the beginning, decisions were made privately (not secretly, as Vance charges): this is not "new" doctrine. Disciples brought gifts to the apostles "and they distributed to each as anyone had need." This "apostolic example" showed male leadership making private decisions about who the needy were, how much each received and how long they were to receive it, without congregational meetings. Vance says they sinned!

2) Acts 6:1-6. Vance labels all private decisions by males as "lording it over." (*ibid*, p. 15-16; Mt. 20:25-27). The disciples had been arguing about who was "greatest" in the kingdom. "Overlording," not decision-making, was sinful and Jesus rebuked them. The apostles made decisions later and were not guilty of abusing authority (1 Cor. 7:6, 25, 40; 2 Cor. 1:23-2:1) like Diotrophes (3 John 9). In Acts 6, before and without calling the congregation together, the apostles privately (not secretly) decided to stop serving tables, and privately (not secretly) decided on seven men (both judgment matters). This is the "tradition of the apostles" (2 Thes. 2:15) which authorizes private decision-making. Vance says they sinned!

3) Acts 9:26-28. The apostles sat in private judgment on behalf of the church at Jerusalem concerning Paul's membership, making a private decision to receive a brother without the whole church, including the women, being present. Vance says they sinned!

4) Acts 11:27-30. The elders acted on behalf of the needy churches as they received the benevolent funds to relieve the needy. Inherent in "oversight" is the ability to "see over" a work (*Bishop*: "An overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that

things to be done by others are done rightly," Thayer, p. 243). (Note: Judgments may be done "rightly" [expediently] or "wrongly" [inexpediently] without sin being charged.) Oversight is not innately overbearing but can be benevolent. Authorized private meetings are not meetings of individuals when they act as an agency for the local church. Elders acted as authorized agents for the church, being duly appointed by the Holy Spirit and the local church for this very purpose. Vance says they sinned!

5) Acts 13:1-3. Prophets and teachers were "in the church" but were not "the church." Yet these men privately, before and without calling the entire congregation together, and without the women, fasted, prayed and laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them away. Their private functions as males were directly ordered by the Holy Spirit and clearly shows that males may act on behalf of the congregation, as do elders. Vance says they sinned!

6) Acts 15:1-31; Gal. 2:1-10. Paul, Barnabas, Titus and the apostles and elders at Jerusalem made private (not secret) decisions on behalf of the church concerning the Gentiles (Gal. 2:2; Acts 15:6). Vance admits it to be judgmental since he wants to make it congregational, but prohibits all private meetings where decisions are made. The whole church enjoyed the benefits of the private meetings and were included in sending the letter to Antioch. It is poor exegesis to deny private meetings on behalf of, before and without calling the congregation together. It is specifically stated that, even when the congregation was included (as in ch. 15), the "decrees" (letters) "were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem" (16:4). James also confirmed this (Acts 21:25) by stating "...we have written and decided..." Private (not secret) decision-making by authorized men was a New Testament practice. Vance says they sinned!

7) Acts 21:15-26. Even after Acts 15, concerning Gentiles in the church, Paul's presence in Jerusalem threatened to disturb the church. He therefore "went in" (v. 18), a private (not secret) meeting with "James and all the elders" to discuss how the church would be affected, for "the assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come" (v. 20, 22). The elders "took heed" and "watched" (Acts 20:28, 31) on behalf of "the assembly," being concerned for the unity and peace of the church. In this eldership

capacity, they "assembled privately to make decisions in matters of judgment for the local church before and without calling together the whole congregation" and advised Paul what to do so that "all may know" (v. 24). This was not "individual action" (*ibid*, p. 97). The elders' advice was binding on Paul as a judgment (v. 23) as they represented and shepherded the flock through a perilous time. Vance says they sinned! Remember Miriam who was not afraid to speak against ordained authority (Nu. 12:1-8).

Response to Negative: The Problem: Strong spiritual work by elders does not conflict with judgment decisions by the same men. It is not either/or, but both. An abuse (the Boston Movement) does not nullify either the spiritual or judgmental work of elders.

Definitions: Vance challenged my definition of "to assemble" as an eldership. But Acts 15:2; 20:17; and 21:17 show elders meeting as an eldership and not as individuals. Such men represent the church as authorized by appointment and function and this sustains the definition.

Feed: Ezek. 34:2-3 describes a shepherd's work but even spiritual functions require judgments (who, what, when, where and how). Can elders frame a letter to a weak member, decide the need for discipline or its form, or plan a class without calling a congregational meeting? It is absurd to appoint shepherds and restrict them from shepherding!

What the debate is not about: He needs to learn the difference between the "decision- making process" (receiving input, advice, info) which includes the whole church, and "decision making" which is a part of eldership oversight. Definitions and scripture study confirm it.

What the debate is about: Vance's book is at the heart of this debate. 1) He affirms a pattern that accuses his brethren of sin, 2) states that he will no longer participate in the practice and, 3) will encourage others to give it up (*ibid*, p. 109), thus causing discord.

Word Study: Vance accused me of dishonesty by wilfully omitting part of Vine's definition on "rule." He knows that complete citations of Vine, Thayer, etc. are impossible. No deliberate omission occurred and he ought to repent of the suggestion. He has not dealt with the citations given, much less with the entire works. Vine, etc. are available for our readers and I rely on them to check

our use. Vance confuses etymology with definitions and ignores contextual usage.

His use of word studies is peculiar, making much over "*episkopeo*" (oversight) but applying it to "*hegeomai*" (chief men). Influence of "those who speak the word" is considerable, but they are nowhere told to "oversee" as elders do (1 Pet. 5:3). Can we agree that Heb. 13:7, 17 includes elders, to whom we are to "submit" and "obey?" Qualified, appointed men (Tit. 1; 1 Tim. 3; Acts 14:23) are bishops over the church and not (unappointed) "chief men." "Unappointed men" are often self-appointed men who want to rule. Vance's use of "chief men" smacks of evangelistic oversight. Whose reasoning is circular?

Fathers/Elders: I did not suggest that elders are heads of the church. But Vance ignored the obvious: fathers/husbands, even as head of a house, are not dictatorial when making decisions (after discussion); God demands it by scriptural definition (Eph. 5:22-23; 6:1). Neither are overseers dictatorial when they make decisions (after discussions); God demands it by scriptural definition (1 Pet. 5:3; et al). Vance "forbids to elders" what God authorizes. If Christians are to "be subject to the higher powers" which are "ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1-2), would this include ordained elders (Acts 14:23) who oversee rightly? Remember Miriam!

Woman's subjection, 1 Tim. 2:11-12: Participation in classes, etc. is not the same as voting. Vance is silent as the tomb on this issue for it is deadly. Giving women the vote to decide matters of judgment effectively destroys woman's "subjection." A vote is total equality and Vance advocates women voting in church assemblies. It is impossible for women to be in subjection while having a vote equal to that of men. Vance demands it; the Bible forbids it.

His Answers: 1) He didn't answer, so I'll rephrase. "Do parents, husbands and magistrates have the right to make decisions relating to their province (Eph. 6:4:1-4; 5:22-23; Rom. 13:1-2)." 2) He didn't answer, again. He has a dislike for people in authority making decisions. Fathers/parents make decisions relating to their headship; civil authorities make decisions relating to their province; bishops make decisions relating to their oversight. Otherwise, words have no meaning. 3) If elders sin in decisions for the church involving judgment, then the Jerusalem elders sinned (Acts 15; Gal. 2; Acts 21, etc.). 4) Yes, the women in Vance's

proposition sin when they vote because they do exercise "authority over a man." A majority of women overrule minority men in voting and there is no "general approbation" in the ballot box. 5) By your answer, you agree that your elders are wrong and should do differently. But if an eldership refuses to change to your position after studying, can you continue being in subjection to them? Either you must charge them with sin and ask them to step down or be inconsistent and accept their decisions even when you think they sin. My friend, you are on the horns of a dilemma.

Answers to his questions:

1) I have shown that "to oversee" and "rule" allow private decision-making by elders and apostles.

2) No, what you describe is dictatorial. Wise elders ask for advice, etc., so that the final decision, which is the elders', reflects counsel (Prov. 11:14).

3) I have never taught *hegeomai* to be elders-only. It may include apostles. Can it include elders at all?

4) Obeying the *hegeomai* of Heb. 13 could apply both to individuals and collectives; include matters of faith and judgment. Why is it so intolerable to you to apply it to elders and matters of judgment?

5) The kings of the Gentiles (Mt. 20:25; Lk. 22:26) lorded it over, not because of place (private decisions), but through an abuse of function (legitimate authority, Rom. 13:1f). Jesus condemned overlording, but authorized privacy (Lk. 9:10).

Questions:

1) When the apostles (males, without the entire congregation) chose "seven" (a judgment decision) men to serve tables, did they sin in this private decision?

2) Do elders sin today when they make judgment decisions on behalf of the congregation before and without calling the church together?

3) Do you believe your elders sin when they make judgmental decisions for the congregation where you worship?

4) How do you reconcile your fellowship in a congregation where this is done when you stated you would no longer do so (*ibid*, p. 109)?

5) In an emergency situation Sunday at midnight, can elders or deacons decide to give financial aid to a needy saint without

calling the church together and do they sin when they do so?

2nd Negative

Vance E. Trefethen

The Problem Grows: When elders privately decide all matters of collective and individual judgment for others (2A, ¶19), the plane has landed in Boston. We're told elders may decide whether a member needs circumcision (1st Debate, 2N, ¶7). If the saint disagrees, they cite Heb 13:17 and decide for him (2A, ¶19). Folks, where does it stop? Compared to involuntary genital surgery, deciding what house you may buy is trivial. But there is no scripture to stop such things once you accept the Affirmative position.

An Interesting Debate: Ordinarily, it takes 2 parties to have a debate. But not always:

"...Heb 13:17...elders...'rule' [Gk hegeomai, VET] over the church and elders are specifically charged with this duty. They are the only scripturally qualified men so charged." (TR, 1A, ¶8)

BUT: *I have never taught hegeomai to be elders-only" (TR, 2A, ¶19).*

"This debate is not about...Excluding the congregation from the decision-making process." (TR, 1A, ¶3).

BUT: *"elders...make private decisions on behalf of the congregation...before and without calling together the whole congregation." (TR, 2A, ¶1).*

"Bishop, overseer (episkopos)...head or overseer of any Christian church" (TR,1A,¶6).

BUT: *"I did not suggest that elders are heads of the church." (TR, 2A, ¶16).*

"...overseers...make decisions (after discussions;) " (TR, 2A, ¶16, emph. added).

BUT: "Before and without calling together the whole congregation" (Proposition).

The Debate is About: " 'Head' and 'lord'...are granted to fathers and forbidden to elders." (VT, 1N, ¶14). "*Vance 'forbids to elders' what God authorizes.*" (TR, 2A, ¶16). I deny headship and lordship, but Tom says I'm wrong. He uses "head" and "overseer" interchangeably (1A, ¶6), and I say that's wrong. This debate is about headship and lordship for elders.

Authority: The keys to understanding authority are context and scope.

Context: Fathers have headship and lordship authority in the family, yet this was applied out of context to elders (2A, ¶16). Governments have authority to make laws and bear the sword, but this was applied out of context to elders (2A, ¶16). Slave-owners and military officers also have decision-making authority (1 Pet 2:18; Lk 7:8). I wait in fear for these to be used as models for elders. Whatever you believe about elders' authority, you must get it from a passage about elders! Otherwise, elders will be enforcing capital punishment, spanking all the kids, treating people like slaves, and ordering military exercises. Please, let's observe context.

Scope: Except for Jesus, all authority is limited. Evangelists have "authority" (Titus 2:15), but don't decide things for the church. Governments have authority, but exceed it if they persecute Christians. Fathers have headship and lordship authority in the family, but exceed it if they order the wife not to go to church. Are we denying the authority of evangelists, governments, or fathers when we say their authority is limited? Tom removed all limits for elders by affirming that they privately decide collective and individual judgments for everyone (2A, ¶19). I'm tired of being accused of saying elders have "no authority" when I simply argue their authority is limited.

Word Study: 1) Presbuteros. No Aff. response to my analysis of Vine's definition.

2) Episkopos (overseer). No Affirmative response to Vine's definition of oversight. No response to the fact that it refers to non-elders in some passages (and therefore gives non-elders private decision-making power, if that's what it infers). No response to the circular reasoning problem. No response to the problem of all saints

privately deciding things in Heb 12:14-15 if *episkopeo* necessarily infers decision-making. And, if *episkopeo* doesn't necessarily infer private decision-making, the proposition is lost.

3) **Pastor.** No response to Eph 4 defining pastors' work as "faith," not judgment.

4) **Feed.** "Spiritual" and "judgmental" work are 2 different things (TR, 2A, ¶9). Since "feed" involves "*spiritual functions*" (TR, 2A, ¶11), not collective judgment, "feed" is out of the debate.

5) **Appoint (kathistemi).** No Aff. response. We agree this applies to elders. It also applies to some non-elders (Acts 6:3; 2 Pet 1:8). This proves nothing about private decision-making.

6) **Rule (proistemi).** 1) No Aff. explanation of the words Vine used to define *proistemi*: "care and diligence," "attend to," "lead," and "maintain." He won't quote them, but his scholar said them. 2) No lexicon was given to show *proistemi* necessarily infers private decision-making. 3) No response to explain Titus 3:14 if *proistemi* infers private decision-making.

"*Silent as the tomb*" on 1 Tim 2:11-12. The perception of silence is explained by Acts 7:57. The word for vote (*cheirotoneo*) isn't in this passage, but we agree it means "general approbation" (2 Cor 8:19), which is what I advocate, and which isn't private decision-making. No Aff. response on 1 Tim 2 saying nothing about decisions without an assembly.

Hegeomai (leaders, chief men) Heb 13:7,17. No Aff. reply to the "word of God," "imitate their faith," and "strange teachings" referring to faith, not judgment. No response to "obey" requiring persuasion and the presence of the multitude. No explanation of Judas and Silas, two non-elder, non-apostle "chief men." We now agree that "those who speak the word" are *hegeomai* (2A, ¶15), so any "decision-making" goes to non-elders who "speak the word" as well as elders. Are you ready for any teacher to decide things privately for the church?

Acts 4:34-37. "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one {of them} claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them...for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need" (Acts

4:32-35). In the NT, the congregation came to one heart and soul about the action before it happened. Aff. wants it "before and without" the congregation. There are no elders or men's business meetings in this text. Acts 4 denies the proposition.

Acts 6:1-6. "In Acts 6, before and without calling the congregation together, the apostles... decided to stop serving tables...decided on seven men" (TR, 2A, ¶3, emph. added). "And the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them" (Acts 6:2). Choose this day...

Acts 9:26-28. 1) "Them" of v. 28 refers to its antecedent, the apostles, just as "they" of Acts 2:1 refers to the apostles of 1:26. Verse 29 shows the fellowship was in preaching with the apostles. 2) Can 12 non-elders in a church of over 5000 privately decide matters of fellowship for a church today? I challenge Tom to affirm they can, if that's what this passage teaches.

Acts 11:27-30. 1) Adding "expediently" and "inexpediently" into Thayer is not acceptable. If a lexicon won't support a position, don't quote it. 2) "Jesus is Overseer, elders are overseers and it means the same in both cases" (TR, 1st debate, 3N, ¶4). Please tell what matters of expediency Jesus is "overseeing" (deciding?) in the Kingdom today and we'll use that as our guide for elders. 3) Give a scripture in Acts 11 showing a collective judgment made without the congregation, who made it, what the specific decision was, and who was invited or excluded.

Acts 13:1-3. 1) Commands from the Holy Spirit are matters of faith, not judgment. Acts 13 has no bearing on the proposition. 2) It's interesting that there were no elders or men's business meetings here. I challenge Tom to affirm that 5 non-elders in a church of 5000 members can decide things without consulting the elders or calling a men's business meeting.

Acts 15:6; 16:4; 21:25. 1) This is about the plan of salvation for Gentiles, not matters of judgment. 2) The multitude was present (15:12). 3) I challenge Tom to state whether elders today may "decide" what people must do to be saved, write a letter with their plan, send it to other churches, and tell those churches to obey their decision.

Gal 2:2. What "decisions" were made in this passage? Paul "privately" discussed "the gospel," which is not a "congregational judgment." Gal 2:2 has nothing to do with this debate.

Acts 21:15-26. 1) "Without calling together the congregation" (TR). "The assembly must needs come together" (Acts 21:22). Choose this day... 2) I don't object to private meetings to "*discuss how the church might be affected*" (2A, ¶8). That's not what we're debating. 3) Nothing was decided about congregational action. The whole church didn't shave or take vows. These elders met with a saint about individual action, which has no bearing on the proposition.

"*Private (not secret)*". "Secret" is one of the definitions of "private," and "private" is a synonym for "secret" (Web. Coll. Dict. 5th ed., p. 780, 898).

"*Vance says they sinned.*" Be careful about ascribing statements to others that they didn't make. Before attributing something, be sure you can cite the reference where it was said.

Answers to Clarified 1A Questions. 1) Yes, as do slave-owners and military officers. 2) Not collective judgments without the multitude. Yes, for specific acts of leadership in matters of faith. (E.g.: deciding to rebuke a sinner; rejecting unscriptural Bible class material).

Answers to 2A Questions.

1) No, they didn't choose 7 men "without" an assembly (Acts 6:2), and no, they didn't sin.

2) Jesus decides that ultimately in the universal church. Local churches determine specific cases by following 1 Tim 5:19-20.

3) & 4) Fellowship isn't in the proposition, isn't on p. 109 of my book, and I will not debate it.

5) Yes, provided the congregation has agreed on this method of handling emergencies. Then, the action follows a decision assembly and isn't "before and without." Be careful with emergencies, or I'll ask about a flood leaving 100 orphans homeless in the rain near a warm dry church building.

Questions for Tom. 1) May a 13-year old boy who was baptized yesterday attend a men's business meeting? May he participate?

2) Can any non-elders (in a church with elders) decide any collective judgments without the elders?

3) In a large church with 14 elders, could 3 elders (without the other 11) privately decide matters of congregational judgment?

4) Did any NT church have a men's business meeting? Give the church and the scripture.

5) Are elders or men's business meetings authorized to "vote" among themselves in making decisions for the church? In a business meeting with 100 men, 51 favor something, 49 oppose. Was it scriptural to take a survey to find out those numbers? Is the matter settled after this survey (vote)?

Summary: Please join me in rejecting the proposition because:

1. It confuses congregational action with individual action.
2. It gives headship and lordship to elders and uses the word "authority" out of context.
3. It confuses the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, the plan of salvation for the Gentiles, and "the gospel" for matters of congregational judgment.
4. It alters or ignores the lexical definitions of words used to describe the work of elders.

Third Affirmative

Tom M. Roberts

With this affirmative, my part of the debate comes to a close and judgment is passed to the readers. Please consider all the material carefully in the light of the scriptures and render a verdict on the evidence. The full debate, without additional material, is to be printed in book form as per our agreement. No new material should be introduced in the final negative.

My Third Affirmative will establish from Generic Authority that the scriptures permit elders to make decisions in the realm of unstated options (judgments), arising from specific commands.

Generic Authority: Non-class brethren confuse generic authority for specific when they demand specific authority for Bible classes, disallowing generic authority. They, like Vance, do not understand authority. It is axiomatic that every specific command of God to do a thing carries with it the generic authority to perform that command by choosing unstated options: when, how, how much, etc. Generic authority is no less authoritative, deriving its force from God's specifics. Specifics are stated; generics are unstated; both are authorized. Examples abound: 1) Noah used gopher wood (specific) but the tools he used were unstated options (Gen. 4:14-22). Tools, essential to obey the command, were authorized as private judgments. 2) "Sing," is God's specific choice; unstated options (private judgments) are song books, etc. A song leader decides privately which songs to sing, how many, etc. by generic authority. 3) Deacons "serve tables" (specific function), but are allowed unstated options concerning the care of tables: how much, how often, etc. 4) Elders are specifically commanded to "feed," "exercise the oversight," "superintend," and "rule," but generically authorized to make decisions between unstated options: who, how much, how often, etc. Examples: elders have the right to decide when to discipline a member, how much time longsuffering requires, how often gospel meetings should be held, what subjects are needed, how long should the meeting last, etc. Wise elders ask for advice (Prov. 11:14), but they make the final decision. Notice carefully: private decisions by elders in matters of judgment are authorized by both

specific, stated authority (affirmatives one and two) and generic, unstated authority. When Vance demands specific authority for each and every unstated option that elders decide (1000's of details), he demands that which cannot be supplied even for congregational decision-making: specific authority for generic options! Deacons could not decide how many loaves of bread to take to a needy family; song leaders could not choose their songs, parents could not decide how to raise their children, and elders could not make any decisions about tending the flock. Generic authority gives elders, deacons, husbands, wives, parents, etc. these options!

Answers to Vance's 2nd Negative: The Problem Grows: Eldership oversight no more promotes Boston/Crossroads than it does popery, but women's equal voting (which he has avowed) surely promotes feminism. Vance's indelicate language re: circumcision ("involuntary genital surgery") belittles the Law and accuses Paul and the elders of mutilation (Acts 16:3; Gal 2:3). But note that a private judgment decision was made! The proposition stands.

An Interesting Debate: Vance accuses that I contradict myself or ignore his arguments. He has been answered but it is needless to respond to quibbles. Space prohibits repetition of my arguments. Please refer to previous affirmatives as well as complete citations of scholars (Thayer, etc.) for accuracy.

The Debate is About: I do not use "head" and "overseer" interchangeably, though some reference works do (i.e., Thayer). Smokescreens will not hide efforts to promote democracy and women's equality instead of eldership oversight.

Authority: Context: Fathers, magistrates and elders have authority in their sphere (Eph. 5:23; Rom. 13:1f; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Vance allows fathers and magistrates to make decisions but denies it to elders, thus unequal in his application of authority. Scope: Jesus and Authority: Human authority is limited as far, but no farther, than God intended. Wives cannot reject husband's authority; citizens cannot reject government's authority; churches cannot reject elders' authority (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). However tired of it he may be, Vance is branded as denying authority to elders when he gives women equal voting and gives to the congregation the authority that God gives to the elders. It is not congregational oversight (democracy, voting) but eldership

oversight! Where is the verse that says to the congregation: "Exercise the oversight?"

Word Study - Presbuteros, Episkopos, Pastor: These words were studied in my first affirmative adequately. Can "overseers" oversee? Evangelists have "authority," but not eldership authority. Non-elders (even bachelors) can watch on behalf of souls (Heb. 12:14-15), but not with the qualifications and appointment of elders. **Feed:** Can pastors decide matters about feeding the flock? If not, they are figureheads and not pastors. **Appoint:** Different people are appointed to different tasks (deacons, for example), but elders are appointed to do the work of overseeing. **Rule (proistemi):** When people learn to "maintain" good works, can they choose unstated options about which good works they maintain (Tit. 3:14-15)? "Rule" allows choice!

"Silent as the tomb" on 1 Tim. 2:11-12: "General approbation" is not "voting." Vance has dodged voting and its implication to oversight and equality. One person, one vote denies 1 Tim. 2:11-12 and destroys subjection. It proves how far *in principle* his theory will go.

Hegeomai (leaders, chief men): Heb. 13:7, 17: I responded clearly to his use of "hegeomai" but deny that "men who speak the word" (evangelists) have oversight, as do elders.

Scriptures: (Please compare my 2nd affirmative.) Acts 4:34-37: Verse 35 states, "and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need" (NKJV). The apostles (males) made decisions about the distribution. Acts 6:1-6: The judgment decision that it would be seven (not six or eight) was made by the apostles before and without the congregation. Only one example is needed to prove my proposition. Acts 9:26-28: Paul assayed to join himself to the "disciples" in Jerusalem and the apostles decided to receive him (apostolic example of deciding for the church). The apostles (12 men) decided not only for 5000 but for disciples of all ages (Phil. 4:9). Acts 11:27-30: I did not attribute "expediently" or "inexpediently" to Thayer, but to the word "rightly." Context decides whether things "done rightly" implies judgment or doctrine. I have cited Acts 11:30 three times where the funds went to the elders (not the congregation) for distribution (judgment decisions). Vance implies they sin if they distribute the

funds. Acts 13:1-3: A matter of judgment, not doctrine (when Saul and Barnabas would depart); the Holy Spirit himself used the prophets and teachers (males) as agents for the church in sending them out. Vance ignores that the church acts through agency, contending that the whole church must always be involved 100% of the time. Acts 15:6; 16:4; 21:25; Gal. 2:1-10: Vance has trouble with textual exegesis. There were private meetings in which decisions were made about matters of judgment before and without calling the congregation together. Titus' circumcision was a matter of judgment (1 Cor. 7:19) having the potential of affecting the whole church (Gal. 2:4) in a matter of "liberty." Acts 21:15-26: The elders met with Paul in a private meeting about an explosive judgmental matter that was about to consume the church and Vance says that it has no bearing on the proposition. This meeting was before the congregation met (v. 20, 22), arriving at a decision of private judgment (re: customs, v. 21) to keep the entire church at peace. It describes my proposition.

"Private (not secret)": Vance's use of "secret" regarding elders' meetings implied something sinister or clandestine (other synonyms for secret). They are private in the sense of agency, the part acting for the whole (Acts 11:30). The Ephesian elders' meeting with Paul was private but not "clandestine" (Acts 20:17f). "Vance says they sinned." If sin is not charged, why this debate? His book states my position to be "without divine authority," in violation of "the pattern," etc. Are you agitating brethren about a personal opinion (Rom. 14:13, 22)?

Answers to Clarified 1A Questions: This is important. Vance admitted that elders have a right to *meet privately, hold secret deliberations, and make decisions before and without calling together the whole congregation, including the women, in matters of faith*. A deeper study of the passages in Acts and Galatians will convince him that they also made private decisions in matters of judgment. He has yielded most of his objections, with only one left to be resolved: judgment decisions. These affirmatives prove it: NT elders made choice in judgment matters.

Answers to 2A Questions: 1) The apostles chose 7 men "without" and "before" the assembly and informed the assembly after their judgment decision. 2) Fellowship can be limited in the universal church: 2 John 9-11. If elders sin (1 Tim. 5:19-20) when they make

private judgment decisions for the local church, charges should be made against them. That certainly creates a test of fellowship. 3) and 4). He refused to answer! These questions were asked to show inconsistency between doctrine and practice. Paul did that (Rom. 2:1f). Vance is feeling the heat or he would have answered. The consequence of his doctrine demands that he charge elders with sin who practice what he condemns; a divisive doctrine. He has taught others not to participate in that which he practices. 5) If elders must have permission from the congregation every time they make a decision, the congregation is the overseer; they don't need elders. Your threat about emergencies, 100 orphans and the dry church building makes me wonder if you believe the Lord is cruel because he put the care of orphans upon individuals (Ja. 1:27) and not the congregations. The liberals talked about 1 "poor little orphan" on the door step of the building and you talk about 100. Faithful Christians wouldn't have to practice institutionalism to take care of 1 or 100 orphans. How would you handle them?

Questions: 1) Yes. Yes, but with deference to the mature men. 2) Yes, deacons can decide matters of their province (Acts 6:3). 3) No, the eldership should act as a body. 4) The church in Jerusalem had meetings and made decisions under male leadership without the whole church being together (see scripture study, aff. 2). 5) It is not scriptural to vote in the Lord's church. A survey is not a vote, else "polls" might elect the next president instead of the ballot box. No, it is not settled by a survey.

Conclusion: I commend Brother Trefethen for his willingness to debate this issue and a conscientious effort has been made to answer every argument. But a divisive and dangerous doctrine is disturbing the peace and harmony of the Lord's people and should be rejected. Godly women do not seek equality with men. Faithful churches submit to the Lord's plan for eldership oversight. There is little doubt that Vance, because of training and sentiment, will embrace the extremes to which his principle will ultimately lead, but others will do so. He has opened a gate that cannot be closed. May God help us not to reflect the rebellion of our age.

3rd Negative

Vance E. Trefethen

Root of the Problem: Eph 4 says elders bring people to "the unity of the faith." But many see elders as a board of directors whose job is balancing a check-book, buying supplies, and managing property. Nothing to do with "faith" at all. If you had to work a full-time job and then run a business after-hours, you wouldn't have time to teach, study, pray or visit much either. This is why you hear so many complaints about preachers doing the work of elders. What a sad waste of the talents of many good men, and what a loss to a congregation.

The work of elders is much more important. They can make the difference between saints falling away or getting to heaven. They are too busy teaching, studying, praying, visiting, rebuking, encouraging, and counseling to privately decide all matters of judgment. The spiritual leaders (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers) in Eph 4:11 lead in "the faith." Do they "make decisions" as they lead? In some limited ways. Evangelists decide how to present a lesson to convert the sinner. Teachers decide what topics to present in class. Do evangelists and teachers privately decide matters of judgment for the church? No, leadership in the faith isn't private decision-making in collective judgment. Why can't we see the same for elders?

A Straw Man: Affirming that elders may "meet privately" is a straw man. Certainly elders can meet privately (James 5, Acts 20, Acts 21). But which of these is a decision in a collective judgment? None. The only example of elders leading a collective judgment is Acts 15:22, where they called "the whole church." The example of Acts 20:7 shows how to eat the Lord's Supper. Acts 15:22 shows how elders lead collective judgment. They stand or fall together.

Boys & Business Meetings: Tom loses all his objections about "women in leadership" by allowing the 13-year old boy in a business meeting. A boy baptized yesterday is as disqualified from congregational leadership as any woman. A non-leader, under subjection to the head of the family, with no authority over the congregation, can scripturally attend and participate

(submissively) in a business meeting to decide things. Think of the dangers! Boys still wet from baptism will try to be preachers and elders, they'll take over the church, reject their fathers' authority and lead all-out rebellion! No, I wouldn't ascribe that to Tom. But if he lets boys participate, he must allow women. And remember, "*men do not prohibit women from doing any authorized activity*" (TR, 1st Debate, 2N, ¶12). If boys can participate, women can too. And if women can participate, men are not authorized to exclude them. And if men cannot exclude women, then Tom's position is wrong.

Book, Chapter, & Verse: Where was the scripture showing any NT church having a men's business meeting? I already knew he believes they're authorized—that wasn't my question. I wanted 1 scripture showing all the males in a meeting deciding congregational judgments. *But there is no men's business meeting on any page of the New Testament!*

Judgments Become Law: Tom's most disturbing doctrine is that Heb 13:7,17 can be used by elders (and other leaders) to turn any matter of judgment into a matter of faith. In the OT, circumcision was a matter of faith (hence, "involuntary"). We agree it's a personal judgment in the NT. But Tom affirms elders may decide someone needs circumcision today, even though the Bible doesn't command it, and may bind it on him without his consent by Heb 13. God was (rightfully) exercising "lordship" in the most intimate aspects of life when he gave that command in the OT. No other word but "lordship" applies if elders give the same command today.

How Did We Get Here? From the mistaken idea that elders privately decide any personal judgment that might affect the congregation in any way. Tom authorizes forced circumcision, but people don't worry much because circumcision isn't affecting many congregations today. What about dating and marriage? That's a personal judgment (1 Cor 7:25) with many "congregational implications." If a saint judges poorly, he will weaken himself and harm his congregation. I've seen it happen. Can elders make marriage decisions for singles in the flock? If Heb 13 lets them cut your body against your will (because of "congregational implications"), you cannot stop them from choosing your date or mate. And who decides whether something has "congregational

implications"? You guessed it--the elders, before and without consulting anyone. They decide whether they can decide it, then they decide it, then they bind it on you, then you have to obey or you violate Heb 13. But that's not "lordship"? Please, open your eyes. No one can bind on you any opinion or practice that isn't in the Word (Mk 7:7). Heb 13 is about obeying spiritual teachings of *hegeomai* (leading men). Tom never has shown anything but matters of faith under consideration in the context of Heb 13.

"Look out, Tom!" *"Where is the verse that says to the congregation: Exercise the oversight?"* (TR, 3A, ¶6). It's Acts 6:3. *"Look ye out (episkeptomai) among you seven men..."* This is the root from which comes *episkope*, or overseer (Strong, p. 31), and was spoken to the congregation. The "looking out" done by elders is in matters of faith (Eph 4:11-12). The "looking out" done by the Apostles (*episkopen*, Acts 1:20) was to *"visit (episkeptometha) our brethren in every city..."* (Acts 15:36). Apostles led in prayer and the Word (Acts 6:4)--matters of faith, as taught in Eph 4, just like elders. For collective judgments, they called the multitude (Acts 6:2).

A Moving Target: In 1A, Tom quotes Thayer to prove elders are head of any Christian church. In 2A, he likens elders' authority to fathers, the head of the family. But in 3A, Tom retracts Thayer on headship. It isn't what Tom's position "might lead to" that worries me. What he explicitly says (and then is forced to retract) betrays where he really intends to go with it.

In the first debate, Tom cited Vine to show the word for "vote" means "general approbation." In 2N, I agreed *cheirotoneo* ("to create or appoint by vote," Thayer) means "general approbation" in 2 Cor 8:19. But in 3A, Tom says it *doesn't* mean general approbation. I believe churches make collective judgments by general approbation. Where does Tom stand?

We won't flood any orphans, but even if we did, Tom and I surely agree on how to help them. Tom can see the fallacy of arguing from emergencies when it's on another issue. Establishing authority by emergencies is evidence of the difficulty of sustaining his proposition from the Bible.

Deacons & Details. Yes, deacons handle details like how many loaves to buy--but only after being authorized by the multitude to

buy bread. Deacons don't just start spending funds "before and without" the congregation's knowledge and consent! Tom never quoted a passage to show they could. And weren't we supposed to be debating elders, not deacons?

Authority of Elders. Jesus expressly prohibited using government as a model for elders (Lk 22:25-26). Kings decide everything for the people (Ecc 8:4). Jesus said spiritual leaders can't act like kings. Worse, we're told elders get equal "*application of authority*" with other authoritative leaders (3A, ¶6). Equal to slave-owners and military officers too? Elders have authority to rebuke sinners. Governments have authority to execute them. Is their authority "equal"? The authority of governments, fathers, slave-owners, and centurions proves nothing about elders. But it does show the dangerous arguments needed to support this proposition.

Who's Running the Show? First debate, we agreed a small group of non-elders deciding things is an unauthorized "rump meeting." But now Tom says "Yes," a few non-elders may decide things without the elders. But then he said "No" about a few elders deciding anything without the other elders. A few non-elders can decide, but a few elders can't. Confused yet? What if separate small groups make conflicting "decisions"? Who wins? God's way is better: Take action that "pleases the whole multitude" (Acts 6:5) after a congregational assembly.

GOT Shoots Tom in the Foot. Unfortunately, GOT printed an extra article with the first debate, voiding our written agreement about publication "without additional material." Did you notice the indictment of Tom's position in the article? A church got into Feminism when "the elders presented a statement" declaring women would have leading roles (GOT 8/18/94 p. 2). Elders *privately decided* to have women leaders (which Tom said was a judgment for men to make, 1st debate, 1N, ¶5). See the danger of elders privately deciding everything? Abuses don't prove anyone right or wrong. But radical feminism is a serious danger of Tom's position.

By What Authority? Has Tom shown positive Bible authority for his practice?

Command: The closest he came was the command to "oversee." But no lexicon defines *episkopeo* as "decide judgments for the

church," nor could he explain Heb 12:15 with that meaning. He said the "oversight" of elders was just like the oversight of Jesus, but he couldn't explain what matters of judgment Jesus is deciding. There's no command for his practice.

Example: An example must show: 1) elders; 2) meeting privately; 3) making and binding a decision; 4) in collective judgments; 5) without a congregational meeting. Acts 4 doesn't mention elders, and he never responded to the prior agreement of the congregation before collective action (4:32). Acts 6 doesn't mention elders and has a congregational meeting. Acts 9 doesn't mention elders, and the pronouns and antecedents ("disciples," "apostles," "them") refer to action among the apostles, not collective action of the church (his use of pronouns gets 120 baptized in the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1). In any case, Barnabas showed that Paul should be accepted on the basis of direct revelation (9:27), not human judgment. Acts 13 mentions no elders, and the men were sent by the Holy Spirit (13:4), not collective judgment. Acts 15:6-18 discusses the plan of salvation (not judgment) with the "multitude" (15:12). 15:19-29 contain matters of judgment and included "the whole church" (15:22). Gal 2 has Peter, James and John meeting with Paul to discuss "the gospel," not matters of judgment (Gal 2:2). Even if they had discussed collective judgments, they met without the other (11 or more) apostles and elders, and Tom said 3 out of 14 cannot decide anything. Acts 20 shows elders meeting privately, but no decisions were made. Acts 21 shows elders meeting privately, but no collective action was decided. None of Tom's examples has the elements of his proposition.

Necessary Inference: In Acts 11:30, the elders must have privately received the money, must have privately decided its use, must have excluded all the members, must have ignored the Apostles' example of Acts 6. Is this absolutely the only possible inference? No, it's speculation. If it isn't the only possible conclusion, it isn't a necessary inference and can't authorize anything.

Summary. Without command, example, or inference, the proposition fails. And consider:

The Bible: "Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided..." (Acts 15:22).

Tom: "Before and without calling together the whole

Second Debate: Third Negative

congregation."

Vance: " 'Head' and 'lord'...are granted to fathers and forbidden to elders."

Tom: "*Vance 'forbids to elders' what God authorizes.*"

Choose which you will believe, and may God help you make the right choice.

