

**WHO ARE THEY?  
WHAT DO THEY DO?**

**WHAT ARE WE TO  
THINK OF THEM?**



# **SPIRITUAL LEADERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

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# The Fact of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

## DOES ANYONE HAVE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY?

**The first issue** which must be clarified in approaching the subject of local church government is the question of authority. All agree that Christ is the Head and that He rules through His Word. But what about authority on the level of individual church function, teaching, and decision making? Does Christ delegate authority to anyone else? Many church groups are sure that He does not, that each man has equal authority before God by virtue of his individual priesthood. Our American spirit of democracy in the church and its "one man one vote" leaves us inclined to agree, at least in sentiment. We feel that we are answerable to God alone, and so authority over anyone in the very personal realm of the spiritual and religious is out of the question. Our beliefs and practices are matters between God and us individually, we tend to think; and in the affairs of the local church collectively, the majority rules.

But does Christ rule by majority vote? Is His will determined by popular consent? Or is it given once and for all in Holy Scripture to be faithfully min-

istered to His people by spiritual leaders within the church? These questions state the issue clearly.

### **The Evidence**

The New Testament is clear in its teaching both by precept and example that there are certain men in the church who are invested with the responsibility of ruling. Christians are not blindly to accept false or unscriptural leadership, but they are nonetheless responsible to follow, obey, and honor their spiritual leaders.

This authority was first vested in Christ's apostles. They were the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20; cf. Matthew 16:18-19) and the very mouthpieces of God (Ephesians 3:5). Their word and example were and are binding (I Corinthians 4:17; 14:37; I Thessalonians 2:13; II Thessalonians 2:15). Their word settled all disputes in matters of faith and practice. They were Divine Legates, vicars of Christ, if you will. This is seen in Acts 6:1-7, when the apostles took charge to settle the first dispute in the church at Jerusalem, and throughout the epistles in their binding and authoritative commands to the churches.

That the apostles intended for others after them to have authority (albeit, not their unique apostolic authority) is evident by the titles given to these leaders, the descriptions of them, and the responsibilities laid upon them and given to the church with regards to them.

\*Acts 20:28 designates the elders of the church at Ephesus as "overseers," those who manage the church.

\*Romans 12:8 identifies those who are specially gifted by God to govern.

\*The Greek word *proistemi* ("to rule, to preside") is found also in I Thessalonians 5:12 referring to those who are "over you" in the spiritual realm, "in the

Lord." In I Timothy 3:4, 5, and 12 it refers to rule in the home by the father. Paul plainly states that some are gifted with the ability to exercise authority in the church.

\*Similarly, I Corinthians 12:28 speaks of the one with the gift of "governments" (kubernesis). A "governor" (kubernetes) was a shipmaster, the one ruling, directing the ship (Acts 27:11; Revelation 18:17).

\*I Corinthians 16:15-16 commands that certain ones in the church be the objects of submission.

\*I Thessalonians 5:12-13 require that those in ruling positions ("those who are over you") in the church be held in special honor.

\*I Timothy 3:5 draws a parallel between the fathers' "rule" in the home and the elders' "care" of the church. The implication here is that the elders' rule in the church is similar to a father's rule of his home.

\*I Timothy 5:17 commands that double honor be given to those who "rule" well.

\* Hebrews 13:7, 17, and 24 all speak of rulers in the church who are to be "regarded with favor," "followed" in matters of faith, "obeyed," and "submitted to." These men "rule" and are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the people. The writer of Hebrews is especially firm in this matter, for in all three of these verses the word translated "rule" is hegeomai, which speaks of "governing" from a position of recognized authority (cf. Matthew 2:6, 10:18; Luke 2:2; Acts 7:10).

Some object that spiritual authority is inconsistent with individual priest-hood. It is significant, however, that while no New Testament epistle emphasizes more the truth of individual priesthood, neither does any epistle stress more the obligation to obey spiritual rulers. The author of Hebrews

saw no inconsistency. The doctrine of universal priesthood does not conflict with the duty of subjection to spiritual authority. Individual priesthood is not individual lordship.

\*Finally, I Peter 5:1-4 speaks of those who lead and oversee the church as under-shepherds (i.e., delegated rulers under Christ). Also, by referring to himself as an "elder" of the church, Peter indicates here that the apostolic authority was in measure being passed to the eldership.

### **Conclusion**

The point is simple: there are to be those in the local church who have authority, to whom honor, submission, and obedience is due. This is not a popular teaching in our day of individualism; indeed, this is regularly vigorously opposed or ignored altogether. But the Scriptural teaching on the subject is plain: Christ, the Head, rules His Church through His under-shepherds.

Nor is this a continuation of the erroneous sharp distinction between clergy and laity. Authority does not imply superior standing before God. Just as man and woman are on equal standing before God (Galatians 3:28) with woman being subordinate to the man (I Timothy 2:9-15), so Christians with equal access to God are commanded to be subordinate to their leaders.

### **An Observation**

One observation concerning the contemporary idea of democratic rule in the local church deserves mention at this point. It is both Scripturally and logically impossible to speak of pastoral rule and democratic rule. The two simply cannot co-exist; they are mutually exclusive. The teaching of church democracy will be challenged at various points throughout this book, but for now it will suffice to say that if God has given authority to a select group of people, then by the nature of the case the authority cannot reside in the hands



of the majority. Moreover, in a system of "one man one vote" no person has any more real authority than anyone else; all share it equally. This chapter has demonstrated that the New Testament writers speak clearly and forcefully of authority given to certain people above others. It is evident that this eliminates the idea that authority is spread out evenly over all. Democracy may be good in the arena of national politics, but it is never given to the Church. No other form of church government is stated in the New Testament than that Christ rules His Church through His appointed leaders.

# The Identity of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

## WHO IS TO HAVE THIS RULE AND AUTHORITY?

We have seen that there are to be those in the local church who are in a position of spiritual authority, ruling and guiding the church. The next step is to identify these rulers. Who in the local church is given this authority?

### **Their Titles**

#### **Elders**

The most common designation is the term "elder." The Greek word is presbyteros, whence comes the words "presbyter" and "Presbyterian." A "presbyter" is an elder. Spoken of in the plural ("elders") they are "the presbytery" (I Timothy 4:14). The word means, obviously, "an older man" but was used as a title for the leaders of the synagogue, whose duty it was to rule and teach. The early church evidently borrowed the title to describe those in the local churches who were likewise to rule and teach. In I Timothy 5:17 the elders are

the "rulers" who by virtue of their position and work deserve double honor. That apostles had absolute authority in matters of faith and practice is clear, but in I Peter 5:1 the apostle Peter calls himself "also an elder" which seems to indicate that the apostles were elders when they remained in one locality (see also II John 1 where John says the same of himself). This verse further shows that the authority of the apostleship, in measure, was passed on to the elders. At any rate, the point is evident that elders have authority in the local church; they are the rulers.

### **Bishops**

Another designation of the New Testament church rulers is "bishop" (I Timothy 3:1; Philippians 1:1). The Greek word is episkopos, hence the English "episcopal." The word means "overseer" (Acts 20:28), "guardian," or "manager." A bishop was a foreman, one in charge, a manager. When the Consul (president, emperor) of Rome placed a ruler in a newly captured land, that ruler was often referred to as an episkopos. Again the point is simply that the Biblical terminology itself indicates that there are in the local church certain men given special authority. These men are "bishops," those who "oversee" or "manage" the church's affairs.

### **Pastors**

The term "pastor" is the most common word in our vocabulary today, but it is (perhaps surprisingly) the least common designation in the New Testament. The New Testament writers only once identify the local church leaders as "pastors" and that as it is associated with the additional title, "teachers" (Ephesians 4:11, "pastors-teachers"). The Greek term poimen means "shepherd," one who guides the sheep. The verb form (poimaino) is used only twice, describing the duties and responsibilities of the leaders they are to "shepherd" the church (Acts 20:28 and I Peter 5:2, KJV, "feed"). In Hebrews 13:20 and

I Peter 2:25 Christ is called our "Shepherd," and in Revelation 2:27 it is prophesied that Christ will "shepherd [KJV, "rule"] with a rod of iron" (see also Revelation 12:5 and 19:15). In I Peter 5:4 Jesus is "the chief Shepherd" indicating that the "elders" (verse 1) are the under-shepherds who rule under Him with a delegated authority. Clearly, then, "pastors" rule; they rule in the church under Christ. They shepherd (are not shepherded by) the sheep.

Those whom the New Testament writers describe as having spiritual authority in the local church are designated elders, bishops, and pastors. These are the men who possess authority to rule.

### **Their Identification**

A quick glance at the passages in which these titles are found will reveal that these titles are used interchangeably to refer to the same office and the same persons.

\*In Acts 20:28 the "elders" (presbuteroi, verse 17) are said to be God-appointed "bishops" (episkopoi, "overseers") and are commanded to "shepherd" (poimaino, "feed" [KJV] or "rule") the church. Notice: elders are bishops who pastor. That is to say, an elder is a bishop is a pastor.

\*The qualifications for "bishops" in I Timothy 3 are virtually identical to the qualifications for "elders" in Titus 1:6-9; it is obvious that Paul had the same office in mind in both passages.

\*In Titus 1:5-7 "elder" and "bishop" are synonymous also.

\*Finally, in I Peter 5:1-4 the "elders" are commanded to "pastor" (poimaino; KJV, "feed") and "oversee" (episkopeo) the church.

So the three terms refer to the same persons. A bishop is an elder is a pastor. There is no distinction between them. It is just as Scripturally accurate to

address your pastor as "bishop" or "elder."(!) This book will normally use the term "elder," but it must be kept in mind that whichever term is used, the reference is to the same office. A pastor is a bishop is an elder.

(Incidentally, in keeping with the common understanding of the words, the term "office" is used here to refer to these leadership positions, but it should be recognized that the New Testament never refers to these as "offices" but as "services.")

### **Their Descriptions**

While the terms consistently refer to the same office, Bible students have often pointed out that each term emphasizes a different aspect of the man and his work. The term "elder" emphasizes the man's character, what he is mature. "Bishop" emphasizes the man's function as ruler, overseer, manager. It stresses what he does. And "pastor" emphasizes the man's work of caring, guarding, protecting, feeding, and leading. It stresses how he leads and rules and his attitude in doing it. All three terms refer to the same office but merely emphasize a different aspect of it.

### **An Observation**

Note that elders are pastors, and elders are rulers. There is a common misunderstanding, today, that eldership is a sort of third office in which elders are a board of men with more authority than deacons but less than pastors. Elders are often viewed as representatives from the congregation, elected for a specific term and for the purpose of representing the interests of the church to the pastor and counseling him on matters of concern to the church. In many other churches the elders are a board of ruling men set over the pastor. These ideas, however, reflect a misunderstanding of the New Testament elder. Pastors are elders. Elders are pastors. As we shall later see, elders have various functions and there are differences in honor as well, but all elders

are pastors, nonetheless, and they must never be considered as anything less. Furthermore, none should be considered for eldership who is not a qualified elder-bishop-pastor.

### **Conclusion**

The New Testament teaches that authority in the local church lies in the hands of the elders-bishops-pastors. To these men both Christ and His apostles have delegated authority, and obedience to them is required by those whom they lead. Elders (bishops, pastors) are to rule as Christ's under-shepherds.

# The Authority of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

## WHAT IS THE SPHERE OF THEIR RULE?

We have seen that the elders-bishops-pastors are given authority from Christ to rule His church. These and no others are commanded to rule and to be obeyed.

It is necessary to recognize, however, that there have been errors to either side of this. Many elders have failed to exercise the authority given them in their rule while others have clearly exceeded their bounds. The next step, then, is to determine the realm or sphere of their authority. That they have authority cannot really be questioned; precisely what type of authority they possess must now be determined also.

### **Surveying the Evidence**

Some statements specify very clearly that the elders rule in the Word. I Timothy 5:17, for example, speaks of some elders who rule particularly by "la-

boring in the Word and doctrine." The writer to the Hebrews commands the believers to follow the faith of their rulers (13:7). This is the idea behind Paul's command to Timothy to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Timothy 4:2). Elders rule in matters of doctrine, faith.

Elders are further given rule in other matters of a spiritual nature. That is, they are responsible to take the principles of the Word of God and apply them to specific matters of personal life. This is what Paul had in mind when he commanded the Thessalonian believers to regard highly those who are "over you in the Lord" (I Thessalonians 5:12). This is also the point of Hebrews 13:17 which commands believers, "obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." The elders have authority in matters of faith and its related practice.

Finally, the New Testament extends this authority over the affairs of the church generally. This is clear from passages which speak of their "overseeing" or managing the church in general without mentioning specifics (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-2). The elders are to be esteemed and held in high favor (I Thessalonians 5:12-13) and are to rule the church as they should rule their own house (I Timothy 3:4-5).

## **Conclusion**

Elders are not given authority to tyrannically dictate in matters of no consequence. They are not authorized to give commands in trivial, non-moral matters. Neither are they permitted to demand total compliance in matters involving the Christian's liberty. Nor can their rule be followed when and if that rule is in conflict with the Word of God. Their authority is in the Word as it applies to matters of church and personal life and extends to the managing of the church in general. Therefore, the judgments of elders in regard to faith and its related practice are to be obeyed (of course, so long as such judgments



are not in violation of the Word of God; cf. Acts 5:29). It would be in keeping with these principles to further give certain priority to their judgments in extra- scriptural matters of concern to the church (e.g., decisions regarding church organization, administration, etc.), although this privilege must not be abused.

# The Number of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

HOW MANY RULERS SHOULD BE IN EACH CHURCH? IS ONE ENOUGH?

Having established the fact and identity of spiritual rulers in the local church, we must now turn our attention to the question of number. How many spiritual rulers are there to be in the local church? The New Testament teaches that a plurality of elders is to be the norm in each local church.

## **Surveying The Evidence**

Only a quick look at the passages involved demonstrates that the apostles and other New Testament writers understood that each church had a plurality of godly men ruling. The reference is consistently in the plural ("elders" not "elder").

\*Acts 11:30 speaks of the elders of the Jerusalem church. Evidently James was not the only one.

\*Acts 14:23 informs us that it was the customary practice of Paul and Barnabas in their missionary work to appoint elders (plural) in each church (singular).

\*Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, and 23 all refer to the elders of the Jerusalem church.

\*Acts 16:4 again speaks of the elders of the Jerusalem church.

\*In Acts 20:17 Paul sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus.

\*In Acts 21:18 Luke speaks of "all the elders" of the Jerusalem church.

\*In Philippians 1:1 Paul addresses the "bishops" of the church in Philippi.

\*In I Thessalonians 5:12-13 Paul instructs the believers of the Thessalonian church in regard to their responsibilities to "those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord." The repeated reference is to "them" rather than "he."

\*I Timothy 4:14 speaks of a body of elders laying their hands on Timothy.

\*In I Timothy 5:17 Paul again speaks of elders in the plural.

\*In Titus 1:5 Paul commands Titus to appoint elders in every city. Evidently this was a part of "setting in order the things that lack"; the implication of this verse, then, is that if a church had only one elder, it would be "lacking" and not in keeping with the norm.

\*Hebrews 13:7, 17, and 24 all refer to a plurality of rulers in the church ("them" and "they").

\*In James 5:14 James prescribes for the one sick to summon to himself the elders of his church.

\*Finally, in I Peter 5:1 Peter addresses a plurality of elders as well.

In short, the New Testament writers never refer to the office as held by a single man. The terms "elder" and "bishop" as they refer to the church office of elder, appear in the singular only in passages which give instruction concerning the treatment of individual elders (I Timothy 5:1, 19), or which list the qualifications which must be met by each individual elder (I Timothy 3:1-2), or where individual elders write in reference to themselves individually (I Peter 5:1; II John 1; III John 1). When referring to the office as such in relation to the church, it is always in the plural. This is the norm.

### **Observations**

Drawing from these passages, a number of facts become evident.

1) It is significant that while the Thessalonian church was only months (perhaps weeks) old when Paul wrote to them, it still was a church with a plurality of elders.

2) Some have argued that the only reason Paul referred to a plurality of elders in each church was that he had in mind the entire "city church" (the collective number of Christians in a given city) and not the individual local congregations which made up that larger "church." Whether or not this was so in some instances may be impossible to determine, but in either case the fact remains that there was a plurality of men to whom the believers in question were responsible.

3) It is noteworthy that Paul's inspired solution to the problem of only one elder (Titus 1:5) is not to establish a new form of church government (i.e., democracy) but to appoint more elders.

4) Only a church with a plurality of pastors is able to fulfill the instruction of James 5:14, which prescribes that the one in severe sickness is to summon "the elders [plural] of the church [singular]."

5) Church elders-bishops-pastors are consistently referred to in the plural. This is clearly the norm for the New Testament church (Acts 14:23). If any church in the New Testament period had only one elder, it is not mentioned (unless Titus 1:5 be the exception, in which case such a condition is said to be "lacking"). Plurality of elders is at least as evident as the plurality of deacons.

### **Objection?**

Some have argued, to the contrary, that the "angels" in Revelation 2-3 represent individual pastors of the seven churches. The message to each church is addressed to an "angel" (singular). "Angel" (aggelos) may be translated "messenger," a fitting designation for the pastor (it is argued), and thus an indication of a singularity of eldership.

However, the reference here should most likely be understood in reference to literal angels and not human "messengers." The term aggelos is used often throughout Revelation and always in this sense. In fact, never in the entire New Testament is the term used of Pastors/elders. For the sake of argument, moreover, even if these angels were pastors, there is still precisely nothing which demands that the supposed "pastor" in question is ruling alone. He may simply have been the chief spokesman of the elders of that church. This is exactly the situation with James in Jerusalem James is clearly in leadership while other elders are with him. Likewise, the same is evidently the case in I Corinthians 3:6 and 10 which seem to imply the prominence of Paul and, later, Apollos in the Corinthian church. By reasons of giftedness a given elder may well stand above others in terms of prominence and influence, but this is not to say he serves alone in that capacity.

### **Advantages**

That a plurality of men is necessary for maximum effectiveness in the local church is evident for a number of reasons, perhaps the most obvious of which

is that the nature of the work requires more than can be done well by any one man alone. This is why such a condition is described as "lacking" (Titus 1:5). To spread a man too thin is to force him to produce inferior work in all areas of his service. The Puritans of early America recognized this and so had in each church at least two elders: a ruling elder and a teaching elder. The ruling elder had the responsibility of the "pastoral" duties personal teaching, visiting, exhorting, etc. The teaching elder was expected to preach (and to preach very well!). Such an arrangement allows men to exercise their gifts to the best of their abilities.

The collective wisdom afforded by a plurality of men working together brings more effective service to the church also.

Finally, a plurality of peers working together in the ministry of a local church serves as a deterrent to dictatorship or tyrannical rule. The most effective deterrent to a Diotrephes (III John 9) or those who would run rough-shod over the church is not a church vote of disapproval but rather fellow elders of equal authority who can more effectively deal with the problem and that before it becomes out of hand.

## **Examples**

Several examples of plurality rule and decision making are evident in the New Testament. Let us briefly look at a few of them.

\*It is fascinating that many appeal to Acts 6:1-7 in support of the contention that the people of the church have rule over the elders (i.e., democracy), for the passage shows the exact opposite. In this passage it is the elders (the apostles functioning as elders; cf. I Peter 5:1) who are ruling. To settle the dispute in the church (verse 1) the elders gave instructions which were followed by the church (verses 2-6). At the elders' bidding, the church selected seven men

to administrate over the affair, who were then appointed by the elders (not the church at large) to that task. "Whom we will appoint" (verse 3), indicates that the elders, evidently, had a power of veto over the decisions made by the church which, in this case, was not needed. Clearly, the elders were in authority, giving instructions and making the appointments as they approved of the church's carrying out of their commands.

Some imagine a church vote in this passage, but this is impossible to demonstrate. That they followed today's practice of drawing up a list of nominees and voting up the best seven is even more foreign to the text. All that is said is that at the elders' bidding they selected seven men whom the elders would then approve and appoint to the task. Furthermore, even if some sort of vote were taken, it was only at the command of their leaders in this one situation, and so it could in no way, by itself, be taken as a blanket statement of democratic church polity. It certainly gives no license for the church to vote for a pastor/elder; the selection here was of servants.

It should be noted that while it is customary, today, to assume that the majority is right and so the majority should rule, the New Testament writers never once even hint that the church's decisions should be made in such a way. No vote is ever summoned or prescribed. None. Not ever.

Rather, the churches are consistently commanded to work together and in unity and in agreement. Not majority but unanimity is the norm! "Be of one mind" (II Corinthians 13:11); ". . .that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind" (Philippians 1:27); "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2; see also Ephesians 4:1-6, I Peter 3:8). How is unanimity achieved? Certainly not by a vote. A vote is a request for division. Unanimity is very easily attainable only when godly men lead responsibly and godly people submit willingly (Hebrews 13:7, 17). This is precisely the New Testament procedure as displayed in Acts 6.

\*In Acts 11:30 the church at Antioch sent relief money to the Jerusalem church, placing the funds into the hands of the elders. The disbursement of the funds was the decision of the elders themselves. No church business meeting or vote of the membership was needed. (Did you ever hear of or perhaps attend one of those church "business meetings" in which multiplied hours passed with the congregation trying to decide how to spend \$4.20? Not so in Acts 11!) It was a decision of the elders.

\*Similarly, in Acts 13:1-3 it is the elders of the church at Antioch who act in accordance to the expressed will of God in sending out Paul and Barnabas to mission work. They needed no authority outside themselves to take the necessary action.

\*In Acts 15 it was the decision of the elders which was binding upon the church.

\*Many also imagine that the New Testament commands concerning church discipline (Matthew 18:15ff and I Corinthians 5) are an indication of democratic church rule. But again, these make no hint whatever of democratic rule but rather of democratic involvement only. To be sure, the people of the church could by their ignoring of the pronouncement of discipline and refusal to disassociate from the one so disciplined (I Corinthians 5:11) render any such judgment meaningless. But that is not democracy it is anarchy! Neither Jesus nor Paul ever hint that in such a circumstance the church is to call for a vote so that in the event of a majority opinion the discipline may be carried out. The command is simply given concerning the steps to be taken with a sinning member (I Corinthians 5:11). It is simplest and most obvious to assume that these difficult decisions are to be made under the direction of the church leaders (elders-bishops-pastors), in which case the people under their care would be obliged to obey.



**Conclusion**

The consistent pattern of the New Testament in regard to local church government is a plurality of elders ruling the church as Christ's under-shepherds. No fixed number is given, but more than one was clearly the norm to be followed (Acts 14:23). This arrangement God wisely made in order to maximize the effectiveness of the elders and so the church.

# The Diversity of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

WHAT DIFFERENCES ARE THERE WITHIN THE ELDERSHIP? WHAT IS THE ELDERS' RELATIONSHIP TO ONE ANOTHER?

With a plurality of men ruling, the question of their relationship to each other naturally arises. Is each elder the same as the others? Are they all equal? Do they all have the same function?

In other words, what differences, if any, exist between the elders in a given local church?

## **Differences in Function**

There is no reason to assume that all elders must perform the exact same duties. Indeed, the indications of the New Testament are to the contrary.

## **Diversities of Gifts**

God has told us that He sovereignly gifts all men differently (I Corinthians 12:11, 18) not only with various gifts and abilities, but also with varying degrees of effectiveness in the exercise of those gifts (cf. Romans 12:3, 6, "measure of faith"; I Corinthians 12:6, "various energizings").

### **Romans 12:6-8**

In Romans 12:6-8 the apostle Paul distinguishes between those who are given the gifts of teaching, exhortation, and ruling. These gifts are not all given to one and the same person, and no one person is necessarily intended to perform all these functions (see I Corinthians 12:12-39). The one with the gift of teaching is to teach (verse 7); the one with the gift of ruling is to rule (verse 8).

### **I Timothy 5:17**

I Timothy 5:17 may offer help here as well. We know that all elders both rule and teach (I Timothy 3:2, 4-5). This verse tells us that all elders rule and that as such they are worthy of compensation. But it specifies, "especially those who labor in the Word and in teaching." The question here is the meaning of "especially" (*malista*). As it stands, it appears to have this narrowing force: all elders rule, while some specialize in teaching. By virtue of their giftedness, their labors are directed more to the public ministry of the Word.

It has been fairly well demonstrated, however, that *malista* ("especially") later in the first century had taken on a more descriptive meaning ("that is"); it was used to specifically designate the identity of the one(s) just mentioned. It has further been argued that this is the meaning of the word in the Pastoral Epistles. If this understanding is correct, Paul's meaning here would be "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, that is, those who labor in the Word and in teaching." In this understanding, "teaching elders" is but a more precise designation of "ruling elders."

I favor the former interpretation, but I am uncertain. This verse may indicate a relative difference in function among the elders. All elders rule, and all elders teach. But some may "especially" be given and gifted to the one or the other.

### **Ephesians 4:11**

This "teaching elder" is so designated in Ephesians 4:11. Here Paul teaches that among the gifts Christ has given to His church is the gift of "pastors-teachers." The wording of the verse indicates that Paul does not intend to distinguish between "pastors" and "teachers" but rather to identify them together ("pastors-teachers"). "Pastors-teachers" are "teaching elders" in contrast to "ruling elders," in terms of primary function.

### **Summary & Conclusion**

Paul writes in I Timothy 3:2 that all elders ("bishops") must be "apt to teach." He indicates in I Timothy 5:17 that all elders rule. He further teaches that some are especially gifted in one of these areas more than in others. Putting this all together reveals that while all elders must be capable in both areas, administration (ruling) may be the special duty of some and teaching the special duty of others. Overlap there surely is, but some distinction is obvious. Within the plurality of elders in a local church there is a diversity of function.

### **Differences in Honor**

It is further evident that since all elders are members of the body of Christ, they are subject to the very same rule which they themselves exercise. While each rules, each is also ruled by the others. All are said to have authority, all are also under the same authority, and none are said to have authority over all. So there is a kind of parity among the elders, an equality.

Yet it is also evident that within this equality there is a diversity of honor.

### **Examining the Evidence**

If our interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:17 is correct, Paul implies that some degree of priority is given to teaching elders. These teaching elders would presumably be the same as the "pastors-teachers" of Ephesians 4:11. This does not imply a spiritual superiority or even a higher ruling authority on the part of the teaching elders but rather emphasizes the superior honor attached to the ministry of teaching the Word of God.

Paul emphasizes this also in I Corinthians 12:28. In listing several of the spiritual gifts in order of importance ("first ... secondarily ... thirdly" etc.), the gift of teaching is ranked "third" behind apostles and prophets only and above governing.

In the mind of the inspired apostle, the public ministry of the Word of God carried with it a unique honor.

### **Examples**

Accordingly, Peter is seen in the Gospels and the book of Acts as the leader, the spokesman of the twelve, and as we follow his life through the book of Acts it is he who is the preacher, while his companions James and John are relatively silent.

Similarly, James is portrayed in Acts 11 and 15 as the prominent one in the Jerusalem church, yet there were other elders who served with him (cf. Acts 11:30 & 16:4).

Likewise Paul was more prominent than his associates Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy.

(Note too that these examples reveal a diversity of function as well as honor.)

**Conclusion**

It is clear that the rulership of the church is properly the work of several men together and not one only. The elders in Scripture are seen as working together while differing in function and honor (I Timothy 5:17). This type of ministry serves well today also: it is a deterrent to any Diotrephes (III John 9), and it increases the effectiveness of the elders and their ministries, allowing them to focus on their personal area of giftedness. It is a most wise arrangement given to the church by her Head!

# The Responsibilities of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

## WHAT ARE THE DUTIES OF SPIRITUAL RULERS?

Also of great importance is the question of what duties and responsibilities the New Testament gives to elders. What is their job description? Why has God given them to the church?

### **Surveying the Evidence**

#### **Their Purpose**

Basic to the answering of this question is the issue of their purpose in the church. Why did Christ give them to the church (Ephesians 4:11).

Paul answers the question plainly: pastors-teachers are given "for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). This verse states that the purpose of pastors-teachers is to "perfect [equip] the saints." II Corinthians 10:8 teaches the same; Paul states that his authority was given him for the purpose of

"edification." Note that in Ephesians 4:12, Paul does not say that the pastors-teachers are "for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (KJV); he says that the pastors-teachers are "for the perfecting of the saints to the work of the ministry." Or, as the NIV paraphrases, "to prepare God's people for works of service." They are to equip the saints (believers) who, in turn, are responsible for the work of the ministry and the building up of the body. In other words, their purpose is to teach and apply the Word of God to the lives of believers and so equip them to serve and build up the church themselves. The passage continues in this vein: through the equipping of the pastors-teachers the members minister to the body, bringing it to "unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (verse 13) and to stability in doctrine (verse 14) and life (verse 15), working together in the power of God toward further mutual edification (verse 16).

This ministry is in keeping with Paul's command to Timothy, "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2). This is a good motto verse for any pastor. It is their responsibility to teach and train others for ministry.

In Titus 2 Paul instructs Titus in this way also. Titus is exhorted to teach (verse 1) "so that" every man and woman in the church will be able to minister, in turn, to others (verses 2-5). The duty of elders-pastors is to teach and train others to minister for Christ also, each in his own capacity.

### **Their Titles**

The titles given to the spiritual rulers also reveal their duties. These men are called elders, bishops, and pastors. As explained in chapter 2, these titles emphasize different aspects of their work. Elder was a term evidently borrowed



from the Jewish synagogue to designate the ones given the responsibility of teaching and ruling. Bishop was to the Greek a manager. A Pastor is a shepherd, one who guides the sheep. And the title pastor-teacher speaks of shepherding and teaching.

From these titles it is evident that the duties of spiritual rulers are basically two: leading and feeding, ruling and teaching.

### **Specific Instructions & Commands**

Expanding on this, the New Testament writers also give many specific instructions and commands (both by precept and by example) to elders concerning the fulfilling of their ministry. These commands, all taken together, provide a basic job description for them. A few of them are surveyed here.

\*In Acts 6:4 the apostles give matters of lesser concern to others so that they may give themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." This verse is significant in that it views prayer as one half of the elders' ministry. Elders must teach and pray.

\*Throughout Paul's first letter to Timothy (properly called a "pastoral epistle" because of its purpose to give instruction concerning the ministry) he speaks over and over again of doctrine and teaching (1:3, 10; 3:2; 4:6, 13, 14, 16; 5:17; etc.). His second letter to Timothy emphasizes the same (1:6, 8, 13; 2:2; etc.), as well as his letter to Titus (1:9; 2:1; etc.). Elders are to teach.

\*According to Acts 20:20 elders are responsible for both public and private teaching.

\*Elders are to contend for the faith, refuting and rebuking false teachers (I Timothy 1:18; Jude 3; Titus 1:9-16).

\*Elders are to guard their people from errors and sins and dangers of all kinds, both from within and without (Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 13:7; I Timothy 4:16).

\*Elders are to exhort (Titus 1:9; II Timothy 4:2), which combines all the ideas of encouragement, comfort, persuasion, counseling, teaching, rebuking, etc.

\*Elders are to rule (I Peter 5:1-2; I Timothy 5:17).

\*Elders are to lead both by precept and example (I Timothy 4:12; I Peter 5:3).

### **Summary & Conclusion**

While all elders do not have identical duties, it is the responsibility of elders to lead and feed, rule and teach. Within this basic guideline are many other responsibilities (such as prayer, guarding, exhorting, etc.). It is the inescapable duty of each presbytery (body of elders) to serve its church in this way. This is God's prescribed method of equipping His church.

### **An Observation**

It is a worthwhile comparison to place this job description along side many job descriptions for modern pastors. Marrying, burying, and praying at local social gatherings may be fine as also are daily calling, sitting with someone at the hospital through a loved one's four-hour surgery, Thursday night visitation, organizing bus routes and church socials and other special events, youth outings, camp, choir directing, children's church, or even church yard mowing, painting, building maintenance, cleaning, ordering janitorial supplies and music and Sunday School curriculum, setting mouse-traps in the church kitchen, arranging chairs, setting up tables, et al. None of these is wrong, but any and all of them must be avoided if and when they interfere with the Divine mission of "equipping the saints to the work of the ministry."

Nothing, but nothing, must be allowed to distract from the God-given duties. The church cannot afford it.

In other words (to end on a negative note), the kind and often-heard comment, "He can't preach, but he is a good pastor," is a self-contradiction. If a man does not by his teaching and preaching equip his people for the ministry, he is not a good pastor, for he has failed to fulfill God's requirements for that office. A good "shepherd" is one who will not starve his sheep but feed them, as well as lead them.

# The Methods of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

## HOW ARE THEY TO ACCOMPLISH THEIR PURPOSE?

It has been shown that the pastor's purpose is "to equip the saints to the work of the ministry" (Ephesians 4:11-12). He is to feed and lead, teach and rule, so that as a result those under his care will be brought to the place where, 1) they know well the teachings of Holy Scripture, 2) their lives conform to and adorn the doctrine they profess, and 3) they carry on the work of the ministry. This and nothing less is his goal.

The New Testament writers also address the question of methods. How is the pastor-teacher to bring his people to this point? Answer: teaching and ruling. This teaching and ruling, however, is accomplished with a variety of methods. These methods can be generally classified under two headings:

**1)** Pastors teach and rule by precept teaching the truths of Scripture and applying its principles to daily living; i.e., expounding and explaining Scriptural doctrine and showing and insisting upon Scripture's demands for daily life

personally and church life corporately. Nothing can ever be an adequate substitute for the declaration of Divine Truth: it alone is life-giving (James 1:18, I Peter 1:23) and life-sustaining (I Peter 2:2). Pastors who neglect teaching and preaching do so at the expense of the church's health and well-being. Pastors must rule by precept explaining and applying the teachings and principles of Scripture.

2) Elders also teach and rule by example living the life that is required in Scripture: maintaining a lifestyle which upholds the Divine Precepts and responds to circumstances and situations in the manner prescribed in God's Word.

### **Teaching**

Teaching cannot be accomplished fully by a Sunday Morning acquaintance with the people only. It demands personal involvement. Therefore, while established teaching and preaching sessions are the best method, they are not the only method. And while they may be the starting point, they are just that the starting point. As already stated, there can be no substitute for the exposition of Scripture in the assembly of the saints, but the pastor will find further effectiveness in the lives of his people when he seeks them out on a personal basis.

The variety of methods available at this point are endless home visitation, social gatherings of all kinds, bringing people into his own home ("given to hospitality"), etc. These occasions, if seized upon, lend themselves very well to informal teaching in the discussion of certain issues doctrinal and other specifically Scriptural topics as well as other issues which arise in politics or society or every day life which can be exposed in their relation to the principles of Scripture. In such an environment the people are being taught to think

Biblically, to think through all affairs of life in their relation to Scripture, the only infallible guide for faith and practice. This is teaching by precept.

Furthermore, in such circumstances the people will presumably be shown an example of a life and mind which submits to Scripture in all areas and which "brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians 10:5). With a life shaped and guided by Divine Principles, the elders teach by example. Through it all the pastor can more fully "equip the saints to the work of the ministry."

So there is the need for formal and informal teaching, publicly and privately (see Acts 20:20, 28).

### **Ruling**

There is also the need for ruling both in public and private. By the nature of it, this is done primarily by precept by direct, specific application of the principles of Scripture to human concerns, questions, problems, and errors. As shepherds of the flock, pastors are also to lead in the difficult but necessary matters of discipline. They must insist on keeping the precepts and principles of Scripture. Faithful ruling requires the public addressing of Scriptural responsibilities as well as public and private exhortation, admonition, and even rebuke. This is a necessary part of the ministry in general and of ruling in particular (see II Timothy 4:2).

Ruling by precept also implies a real exertion of authority when and if need be. In the face of sin, for example, Paul would rather try first to settle the matter by Scriptural instruction (I Corinthians 1:10-13), but he was also willing to be more bold in his rebuke when it was necessary (I Corinthians 4:21, "rod"). In I Corinthians 4:14 Paul says that his intention was not to "shame" the Corinthians for their sin, but rather to "admonish" them and so correct the problem. However, just a cursory glance over verses 6 through 13 reveals that

"shaming" them is precisely what the apostle did, even to the point of stinging sarcasm. Verse 14 means, then, that he was willing to be as stern as necessary in his ruling and dealing with sin, but only as a means to a greater end; the resolution of the problem. In other words, elders must rule even to the point of stern rebuke and not by mere example or entreaty only.

### **Praying**

Acts 6:4 gives another and often overlooked pastoral requirement: prayer. Indeed, this is shown to be one half of the ministry. Moreover, it is the half which gives the other its greatest effectiveness. "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." God has promised to work through the means of prayer; the pastor who neglects prayer does so to the hurt of his people as well as himself. He must never presume that God will do apart from prayer what He has promised to do through prayer. That church whose pastors continually bring them to God in prayer is a blessed church.

It would seem obvious that a pastor's prayer should not only be for his people but also with his people. Again, this is a part of the ministry and also a method of accomplishing the other aspects of it. Praying with his people a pastor not only brings his and their petitions to God, but he also teaches them (by example) the importance and practice of prayer itself. He also by this shows them how to pray. Furthermore, he thus stresses the value of spiritual things in general by maintaining this heavenly focus and emphasizing a dependence upon God for all things. In short, by this the pastor further equips the saints for their ministry to the body. This dimension of teaching is invaluable to the people individually and to the church corporately, and it often can be accomplished in no other way.

### **Hard Work!**

No discussion of the elders' work would be complete without showing just how much work it requires. Paul said it well in Colossians 1 where he said that his goal to bring men to maturity (verse 28) is accomplished only through "labor, striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily" (verse 29). The Greek root words behind this are still more emphatic they speak of "energy," "agony," "dynamic." For a pastor to study, pray, teach, preach, and exhort as he should, it will put a drain on his heart and often brings mental and as well as physical fatigue. It is a price well worth the result, to be sure. But a high price, nonetheless. There are no short-cuts to effective ministry.

### **Summary & Conclusion**

Pastors must rule and teach, both publicly and privately, in many ways and always in conjunction with prayer. This is the divinely appointed program for the ministry. This is the way to true success in the church.



# The Motives of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

## WHY ARE SPIRITUAL RULERS TO RULE?

The New Testament writers lay great stress on the motives of spiritual rulers.

\*They are not to seek the office of elder out of a mere desire for authority (III John 9, Diotrephes, who loved to be first). This would be a violation of Christ's instruction concerning the service attitude of leaders (Matthew 20:25-26).

\*Neither are they to take on these duties only for financial gain (I Peter 5:2, Acts 20:33) or for other personal gain. This does not mean that an elder should not concern himself with providing for himself or his family (I Timothy 5:8), but this must not be his motive. It is a question of the heart, and of priorities.

\*Nor should they serve "by constraint" or only because they feel they must, but rather "willingly" (I Peter 5:2).

\*Rather, an elder must serve out of a desire to serve (I Peter 5:2). Again, it is a question of the heart.

\*Moreover, they should serve joyfully (Hebrews 13:17) and with a heart of gratitude (I Timothy 1:12-14).

\*Furthermore, elders should serve out of a sense of divine mission (I Corinthians 9:16-18; I Timothy 1:12).

\*Similarly, they should serve with a great sense of responsibility (II Corinthians 2:16; I Timothy 4:16). Hebrews 13:17 emphasizes the fact that elders must give account (report back) to God for their work and how they pastored their people; this should be enough to keep every elder on his knees!

\*Accordingly, they should serve with knowledge of coming reward for their service (I Peter 5:4). This is precisely the issue involved in I Corinthians 3:5-15 where Paul pictures the Christian minister standing in judgment for his work with his worthless works being burned up and his worthwhile works remaining; he will be rewarded for his worthwhile work (verse 14).

\*Spiritual rulers are to be servants and not hirelings. They are to emulate their Master Who taught them that greatness is found in service (Mark 10:35-45; John 13:14).

# The Placement of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

## HOW DOES A MAN BECOME AN ELDER?

The next question which arises concerns the way in which a man comes to be an elder in a local church and how he comes to be recognized as such. There are basically two steps by which a man becomes a pastor/elder in a New Testament local church: Divine appointment and human appointment.

### **Divine Appointment**

#### **The Fact of It**

The first and most obvious step in becoming an elder is Divine calling, Divine appointment. This was true of the apostles themselves (Romans 1:1, "separated unto the Gospel"; Ephesians 3:7-8 and I Timothy 1:12, where Paul speaks of his being in the ministry as Divine placement, a special privilege and enablement) The same is true of all ministers of the Gospel. In Acts 20:28 Paul tells the elders of the church of Ephesus that the "Holy Spirit has made

you bishops." Peter affirms the same in I Peter 5:1-2. Clearly, God appoints those who are to be elders. It was John Newton who said, "None but He who made the world can make a minister of the Gospel."

### **His Method**

But how? What is God's method in calling these men? And how can they know it themselves? The answer is very simple and yet often overlooked: God calls by gifting. In Ephesians 4:11 Paul says that God has given pastors-teachers to the church. They are men gifted with that ability and are themselves gifts to the church. God sovereignly distributes spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 12:11, 18). Some are given the gifts of teaching and ruling and pastoring; such men are elders. In other words, God calls by equipping with the necessary abilities. A man who has no ability to rule or teach has not been called to be an elder (I Timothy 3:2, 4-5); it is that simple. If God calls a man, He also equips him for the task. Giving the necessary abilities and gifts for the task required is a part of God's calling to the work.

According to I Timothy 3:1, one evidence of God's calling of a man to the presbytery (eldership) is a desire for it. This does not mean that anyone with the desire is called; there are many who have had merely a desire to excel or a lust for authority. But it is safe to assume that a person whom God calls to be an elder will have the God-given desire for it.

The first step in becoming an elder is God's. He sovereignly appoints men to this office, equips them accordingly, and places in them an honest desire to serve Him in this way.

### **Human Appointment**

A man duly qualified and who evidences a Divine call is then appointed to an eldership position by the existing elders. The New Testament knows

nothing of men becoming pastors by popular vote or any method other than placement by those who were currently ruling.

Luke writes in Acts 14:23 that Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders in every church" and "set them aside" unto that task. This was the case with Timothy, who through the laying on of the hands of the presbytery was gifted for the ministry of the gospel (I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 1:6). In Titus 1:5 Paul commanded Titus to do this very thing while he was in Crete: "For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest put in order the things which are lacking, and appoint elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." Notice that Paul appointed Titus who, in turn, appointed more elders. This pattern may also be what is implied in I Timothy 5:22. In all of these examples the rulers are appointed by the existing rulers.

It is also evident that the elders were not called in from remote places a favorite Bible college, theological seminary, or whatever. They were appointed to serve in their own church where they had proven themselves and demonstrated an ability to teach and lead. With our modern methods of choosing on the basis of one day's meeting, it is no small miracle that it ever works! This is not to say that our modern methods are wrong in every respect, but any comparison shows which method would be more productive.

It should be noted that in Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5 the Authorized Version (KJV) speaks of "ordaining" elders. This translation is the result of the Anglican ecclesiastical bias of the translators. The Greek word in Acts 14:23 is *cheirotoneo* which speaks of appointment or selection. The Greek word in Titus 1:5 is *kathistemi* which simply means to place or to appoint. These verses stress the fact that elders are appointed by those who were previously appointed to the same task. The words have nothing whatever to do with "ordination" as a religious or "ministerial" rite (see John Gill's *A Complete*

Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, vol.II, pp. 579-584).

Some insist that Acts 14:23 gives evidence of democratic rule, indeed, a democratic vote. Cheirotoneo (from Cheir, hand), they argue, indicates "election by the outstretched hand"; i.e., voting. The verb, however, does not indicate this at all; it simply means "to appoint." In Acts 10:41 the verb procheirotoneo is used of God "choosing before" those who should witness Christ's resurrection. I am sure that no one would want to insist that God held a popular election to determine who those people would be! He simply selected them Himself. The significance of cheir ("hand") may be more of pointing than voting. The verb simply indicates that Paul and Barnabas themselves (in this case) appointed elders in every church.

### **Tenure of Service**

The Scriptural passages involved indicate that the appointment to eldership is a permanent one: nothing is said to limit the appointments to a particular tenure of service. God equips the man for service, and the man, in turn, gives his life to it until, for whatever reasons, he is no longer able to perform the duties required.

### **Conclusion**

Elders-pastors-bishops are called of God to their task, sovereignly gifted to fulfill the obligations of their office, and appointed to their work by those currently in rule. The New Testament knows of no other method. There is no need to search for a direct succession of elders back to the early church, but this is the pattern of elder-placement that is given to us.

# The Qualifications of Spiritual Rulers In The Local Church

WHO CAN RULE IN THE LOCAL  
CHURCH? WHAT CONDITIONS  
MUST BE MET?

Of great importance in the appointing of spiritual rulers is the issue of their qualifications. Because of the nature of the office, better no elders than wrong ones.

To help in that regard, in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 Paul lists at least twenty-six different requirements which must be met for a man to be an elder. This chapter will briefly examine these qualifications.

## **I Timothy 3:1-7**

1. Blameless. The Greek term (anepileptos) signifies "not able to be taken hold of," that is, above reproach, unassailable. It suggests that he is truly worthy of his good reputation. This word does not mean sinless or faultless,

but it indicates that his character and piety are unassailable. There are no glaring kinks in his armor.

This qualification is basic. It is basic in that it is so broad and all-inclusive that all the remaining qualifications are gathered up into it, and they expand on it.

2. Husband of one wife, or more accurately, a one woman man (*mias gunaikos andra*). This is not, as some imagine, a requirement that all elders be married, although that the elder (bishop) is married may well be Paul's assumption. Nor does this qualification concern the subject of divorce specifically. Rather it is a moral requirement: he must be a "one woman kind of man," a man who is not flirtatious and does not have eyes for all the women but is faithful to his own wife.

Incidentally, this is one qualification that can never be filled by a woman. No matter how godly and gifted the woman may be, she can never be the husband of one wife, a one woman man. Paul requires that only men be elders, contemporary objections notwithstanding (cf. I Timothy 2:12; I Corinthians 14:34).

3. Vigilant or temperate. This word (*nephalios*) originally implied abstinence from alcohol but came to have a figurative sense signifying "sober" or "sober-minded," "clear-headed." In other words he is alert, cautious, circumspect.

4. Sober. This word (*sophron*) speaks of self control. It implies the ideas of thoughtful, sensible, sane. He is not always the clown; he is serious minded.

5. Of good behavior. This means "orderly, well arranged" (*kosmios*). His mind and inner man are in good order and are evident by his outward living and his demeanor.



6. Given to hospitality. This term (*philoxenos*) literally means "lover of strangers" and implies the ideas of hospitality, generosity to guests, and openness to all, not a select few only. His front door is always open and his welcome mat is always out, especially for the people under his care. Nor is he hesitant to have others view him in his home life.

7. Apt to teach. While some elders are more gifted than others and while some may be given more to the public ministry of the Word, all elders must be "skillful in teaching" nonetheless. This qualification is often minimized but only to the detriment of the church. Good character is essential, but that alone will not replace skillful teaching.

This qualification implies that the elder have a superior grasp of the Word of God and a resolved commitment to teaching. He must have proven himself to be able to set forth the Word of God with a measure of effectiveness. Furthermore, he must be a diligent student of the Scriptures, with a passion for truth and willing to "labor" in the Word (*kopiaio*; I Timothy 5:17; I Thessalonians 5:12. This word, as the apostle uses it often, implies a thorough diligence in the work of God, in these passages the preparation and ministering of the Word of God specifically). If a pastor is to feed his flock, he must have some ability to communicate the Word, and he must have attained some degree of knowledge of it.

8. Not given to wine. This term (*paroinos*, from *para*, beside, and *oinos* wine) signifies literally, "not [one who lingers] beside [his] wine." That is, he is not addicted to wine. He can control it, it does not control him.

9. No striker. An elder must be in control of self (see number 4 above) and further must not be "given to blows" (*me pletes*) or given to violence. He must not be pugnacious or easily riled. He must not be the kind of man who wears a chip on his shoulder or who has a quick temper.

10. But patient (next in order of Greek text). In contrast to being violent the elder is "lenient" and gentle, genial, conciliatory, forbearing, equitable.

11. Not a brawler (amachos, again following the order of the Greek text). Neither is the elder contentious. He is "not a fighter, averse to fighting." This qualification probes deeper than number 9 above: not only does he refrain from fighting, but he is not even inclined to that sort of thing, whether physically or verbally. He does not fight or quarrel.

12. Not greedy of filthy lucre. This term (aphilarguros) signifies "not a lover of money, not fond of money." Earthly treasure is not his goal, and he is not in the ministry for money. This further implies, then, that he is generous, not overly-possessive of his material blessings.

13. One that ruleth well his own house having his children in subjection with all gravity. The elder is not run by an unruly wife or family; rather he rules his home well. Accordingly his children are obedient, submissive. He is "grave," dignified and courteous. The picture is that of a man who is gentle and kind but having unquestioned rule.

This qualification is expanded upon; an explanation is given: "for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" Here Paul argues from the lesser to the greater. Every man should rule his house well; if this man can not, how could we expect him to rule the church? A man who can not rule his own home well is not only unfit but unable to rule in the church.

14. Not a novice. He is not "newly planted," a new convert. The idea of age is obviously involved, but the emphasis is on maturity, whether he is eighteen (e.g., Charles Spurgeon) or fifty. Nor does maturity come automatically with a B.A. degree, even if it is from a Christian college.

A man may be gifted with great and unusual abilities, but if he is not yet mature, he may become "lifted up with pride" and "fall into the condemnation of the devil." A man taking such a responsibility before he is ready for it surely approaches pride which could bring disaster upon him and those under his care also. Maturity is essential.

15. A good report of them who are without. He must have a good reputation with those outside the church. He must be one who has a good name in the community. He may be persecuted because of his holy life (II Timothy 3:12), but he must be recognized as having high character and good and honest behavior.

### **Titus 1:6-9**

Turning now to Titus 1:6-9, we find that the qualifications are basically parallel. Only those not found in I Timothy will be examined here.

16. Blameless (anegkletos). Basically the same as I Timothy 3:1 although not the same word. The elder must be "above reproach, without indictment."

17. Having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. Again basically the same as I Timothy 3:4-5 but adds the idea of the children's faith: they are not only well behaved and well disciplined, but they also are believers. Their life follows the faith.

18. Blameless as the steward of God. "Blameless" is the same as I Timothy 3:2 but this adds the idea of stewardship to it. He must be a good manager of the things which God has given him.

19. Not self-willed. An elder must not be obstinate, stubborn, or unwilling to listen to others. He must not always insist on his own point of view or rights. He is rather "others-willed" and is concerned for the feelings and rights of others.

20. Not soon angry. He is not inclined to anger. He is not quick-tempered.

21. Not given to filthy lucre. This term (me aischrokerdes) signifies "not greedy of shameful gain." The elder must not be one who is willing to make money by questionable methods. Again (as number 12 above), his focus is not on material things but spiritual.

22. A lover of good men. This translation is too restrictive. The word (philagathos) implies much more; he is "a lover of that which is good," whether men or women or things or truth itself.

23. Just. He is "righteous," fair, impartial, objective, able to make decisions based upon principle alone.

24. Holy. An elder must be a "devout" man (osios).

25. Temperate. He must be "self-controlled, self-mastered," able to control impulsive passions. He is subject to the will of God.

26. Holding fast the faithful Word. This implies both a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures and a commitment to it. He is stable in the faith in every respect so that he can be trusted to live what he teaches and "refute those who contradict."

These are the qualifications which must be filled by each elder.

## **Observations**

### **The Importance of the Office**

It is evident that the apostle took very seriously the office of elder. The qualifications touch virtually every area of life. Even a cursory look through them as given above is sobering. God requires of the elders an impeccable reputation both from within and without. God expects spiritual rulers to be

exemplary, indeed, examples to the flock. The office and its responsibilities are too important to be given out indiscriminately. I say it again: better no elders than wrong ones.

### **The Emphasis**

While several abilities are required, such as teaching and ruling, the emphasis of these qualifications is clearly on character. The apostle is not so concerned with gifts, degrees, popularity, or other matters which are today deemed important. He is concerned primarily with the man's character. He must be mature and sanctified.

### **Other Requirements?**

There are other requirements not so stated in these passages, such as the man's ability to fulfill the necessary duties of his office; a man who cannot fulfill these is not qualified for the office. (For an excellent examination of the basic qualifications/responsibilities of a minister and the corresponding obligations of the church, see the sermon entitled "An Able and Faithful Ministry," delivered by Samuel Miller in 1812; published by Presbyterian Heritage Publications, Dallas.)

### **DISqualifications?**

It is clear, by the nature of the case, that a man who does not meet these requirements or who at some time fails to meet them is not qualified for the office. Furthermore, one implication of I Timothy 5:19-20 is that it may become necessary for the other elders to judge that a man duly qualified for the office has become disqualified by reason of some personal sin or character flaw.

This is a very serious matter, and it must be recognized that only Scriptural reason is sufficient justification for such disqualification. The

all-too-well-known custom of dismissing a pastor by the whim of a church board or a majority opinion is a prideful rising above the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Moreover, a Church's constitution which allows such action is also clearly in error. A man's standing with regard to eldership can be and must be determined on the basis of Scripture alone.

### **Conclusion**

These are the distinguishing marks of a man qualified to be a spiritual ruler in a local church. Let us be careful that our list of qualifications is the same, and let us insist that they be met. The health and good of the church depends on it.

# Membership Responsibilities

## WHAT ARE THE DUTIES OF THE MEMBERSHIP?

We have surveyed the nature and function of the office of elder. To complete the discussion, we must also see the corresponding responsibilities of the congregation as a whole.

As we have already seen, the New Testament gives several specific commands to the church with regards to their spiritual rulers: favor, esteem, love (I Thessalonians 5:12-13), honor (I Timothy 5:17), support financially (I Timothy 5:17; I Corinthians 9:4-14), remember, follow, obey, and submit (Hebrews 13:7 and 17). While these commands have already been surveyed earlier in order to demonstrate the authority of elders, they merit repeating in this chapter in order to view them from the standpoint of the church as a whole. These commands are directed not to the elders but to those under the elders' rule, and they require certain things of these people.

In our day and society of rebellious "rugged individualism" we tend to feel that these commands are somehow out-dated, somewhat less binding, if not a bit less inspired. But, of course, God still does require his people to willingly place

themselves under the leadership and authority and accountability of Biblical elders and that with an attitude of great love and gratitude and honor for them. Of course this places great responsibility upon the elders as well: they must lead responsibly and only within the framework of their God-given rule. And of course all this assumes that the pastors-elders are themselves living, leading, and teaching in obedience to the Scriptures. But within this framework, Christians are given certain obligations with regards to their pastors. They are to place themselves willingly under the Biblical and godly leadership of faithful overseers. We are all too familiar with church problems of so many kinds, but they all could be completely avoided if the elders-pastors were faithful and responsible in their leadership, and if those under their oversight were faithful to follow their lead. There are obligations given to both, and both are responsible to be faithful in their God-given roles for their own good, for the health of the church generally, and to the glory of God.

This deserves some thinking and application. Are your elders-pastors faithful in their oversight, providing Scriptural counsel and responsible leadership? Well then, did you ever consider that God expects you to submit to them? Or did you think, "If I don't like it I can go somewhere else!" Now of course, if your elders are not living and leading according to the Scriptures and faithfully teaching the Scriptures, then by all means go somewhere else! But under the oversight of such Biblical leaders you are not to maintain a renegade spirit. Decisions of moral or spiritual consequence deserve their counsel, and you should not feel that you can just "take or leave" the counsel of duly qualified and functioning pastors-elders. To be sure, you must weigh it against the Scriptures, for they alone reign over your conscience. But God's commands with regards to your submission to elders do mean something. The commands require an attitude of submission to their leadership under God. Their counsel must be given due weight. They must be allowed to influence your life and your decisions.



The church is further responsible to be taught by elders and that in order to "follow their faith" (Hebrews 13:17). This implies a diligence in learning and a faithfulness in attendance under their teaching. If it is wrong for a pastor to fail to faithfully teach in private and at the stated meetings of the church (and it surely is), then it is equally wrong for his people to be unfaithful in their attendance, listening and learning. It is the elders' duty to teach; it is the congregation's duty to be taught. Moreover, while again your conscience is captive only to the Scriptures, you must never maintain that renegade spirit of independence from their teaching. Many have gone off into error just this way. No. "Follow their faith." "Esteem them highly in love for their work's sake." Elders-pastors-bishops are God's gifts to you, the church, for this purpose.

The commands of Hebrews 13:17 are of special significance in that the author gives two brief explanations for them. Obedience and submission to spiritual rulers is necessary because these rulers are accountable for the spiritual welfare of their people; they "are watchful for your souls, as they that must give account." Submission to them is necessary because this is their God-given responsibility, a responsibility for which they will be called into question. This should keep all elders on their knees, but it should give their people a greater sense of responsibility as well. Submission is also commanded so that the elders may fulfill their duties "with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you." Unsubmissive people produce grieving rulers who, then, cannot minister to their people so effectively. Submission is commanded and is necessary for the sake of everyone involved.

The rulership of the elders is not optional but mandatory. It is required that elders rule, and it is required that their people obey and honor.

It is also significant that in I Thessalonians 5:13 Christians are commanded to especially "love" their elders. One evidence of this love is found in fulfilling the

requirement of I Timothy 5:19, which commands, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." In other words, while the slander is inevitable, it is to be rejected unless established. Elders-pastors are to enjoy your protection and be given the benefit of doubt; love will think the best of them until it is able to do so no longer.

Perhaps it would be helpful here to stop and consider the value of pastors-elders. Scripture commands love, respect, admiration, "double honor," as well as submission. All of these commands assume that these men are not only faithful in their service but also uniquely valuable. Think: where would you be if it were not for the teaching and preaching you have heard from these men? Would you be Christian at all? Would you have the spiritual joy and confidence that comes from the deeper knowledge of God's grace through Jesus Christ which they have taught you? Would you have a peaceful outlook on life without their instruction concerning God's faithful care and provision? Would you have the same happiness in your home if it were not for their faithful instruction to you from the Creator of the home? Just how valuable are these things? How valuable is that counsel which was given when you were in that deep struggle or time of grief? How can we value their intercessory prayers on our behalf? How can we attach appropriate value to these blessings? God has given us these men for these purposes, and when we consider them we understand better their value and find the commands to love and respect and submission to be happy ones. To be sure, these men make mistakes, sometimes big ones! But these good gifts of God to His church are worthy of our respect, love, and submission. And for them we should daily give God thanks and praise for providing for us in this way.

Finally, all this about support and appreciation in light of their great value should drive you to pray for your elders-pastors (cf. 1Thessalonians 5:25; 2Thessalonians 3:1). Their work is important, and they deal often with very personal life issues. They need as well as deserve your help in intercessory

prayer. *Pray for them.* Pray often. Pray fervently. For their sakes, for your sake, and for the sake of all those whom they will influence. Pray that God will keep them faithful in this valuable service and use them to His glory alone.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The New Testament lays down a simple pattern for church government. God has entrusted authority to a plurality of men (elders-bishops-pastors) who are responsible to bring the saints to maturity through their public and private and prayerful and selfless teaching and ruling. The church is responsible, in turn, to render to these and their teaching submission, obedience, and respect.

That this is God's pattern is clear. That this is the practice of today's church is not so clear! When a church does not follow the blueprint given by its Head, it cannot wonder why things go awry. When it follows His guidelines, He will bless. As we find at every juncture of the Christian life, individually and corporately God's way is not only right; it works.

May God give today's spiritual rulers a new determination to teach, preach, pray, and rule with more dedication and vigor and love. May God grant that they give themselves wholly to their ministry, making full proof of it (II Timothy 4:5), and so receive great reward (I Corinthians 3:10-15, I Peter 5:4).

May God also grant that His people will follow their spiritual leaders, denying self and putting away pride and feelings of self-sufficiency, readily acknowledging, rather, their need of gifted men to watch over them, bring them to maturity, and equip them for the ministry.

This is God's plan for His church. May He give us grace to follow that to the living God may be "glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."