

December 1986

Volume 26, Number 12

A Leadership Crisis

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"So when they had appointed elders in every church . . . " -- Acts 14:23

One can hardly read about Paul's first preaching tour into Asia Minor without being thrilled at the introduction and success of the gospel among the gentiles of that region. (Acts 13,14).

H. Leo Boles estimates that Paul traveled "twelve hundred eight miles; this was a long journey at that time with the ancient modes of travel." Boles adds, "Paul and Barnabas had traveled the twelve hundred eight miles and had established more than half a dozen churches within the two or three years that they were gone on this journey." (A Commentary On Acts by Leo Boles, published by The Gospel Advocate Company.)

Not only were these churches established, at least three of them -- Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch -- had an eldership in place. (Acts 14:21-23). All of this within about three years.

I am impressed with a number of things. The efforts and sacrifices of Paul and Barnabas to get the gospel to the lost. Their persecutions for the gospel's sake. Their successes and failures in converting the lost. The reactions to their preaching – ranging from whole hearted acceptance to outright violence. Their being able to appoint elders in the churches on their return trip.

Now, with the introduction out of the way, let's get to the real reason of this article. I am disturbed by the number of churches that are operating without an eldership. I am also concerned by the lack of concern among us about this condition. I do not believe that we are overstating the case when we say that there is a serious leadership crisis among the churches. There are churches, good sized churches, who have met for, not two or three, but twenty or thirty years or more without elders to lead them. Instead of getting better in recent years, the trend has worsened. I fear that in many areas elders are becoming an endangered species. If the trend continues, my grandchildren may be members of congregations for a lifetime without the guidance and oversight of an eldership. I have had older Christians to tell me that they have been Christians from their youth but have never served under an eldership. It is down right scary to one who has spent most of his preaching life warning against departures from the faith in church organization.

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Others seem to want to put an arbitrary time limit or how long a church car a little entors. One preacher suggested to a gooded massing light there in specifical papers are engine the wichtership then five each without that exist no appen for the second meg to the minimayte not it to large men a descar out will not appears that I have been a some tions in a wrone Congregations, like business levelope at different paces In which with set a definite period of Fig. 17 every Christian to become a recher of Heb 51.2-14) or be considmed bad wrong is foolishness. Some mag e leachers almost immediately, because the Biblio and about the Biblio and the second of the second o

there is something wrong with another who must have more time before he can become a teacher. Similarly, churches vary in the time needed to develope an eldership. Some almost from the very beginning may have two or more men who are qualified. Others may not have such men for years. So, let's not be too hard on churches simply because they have not appointed elders in "X" number of years. We need to look at other factors as well.

Antioch (of Pisidia), Lystria, and Iconium had men qualified and appointed in a real short time. It can be done. Some have suggested that since these were appointed so soon after their conversion that maybe we are putting too much emphasis upon meeting every qualification of 1 Tim. 3 and Tit. 1. It is assumed these men could not have had time to develope every thing on the list. Wait a

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relication to call of residence these man your not have had to fall. from scratch in their path to qualificaden. Same of those converted in each place had been Jews. They would have aready had a good knowledge of the Glo Testament and possibly even the ability to teach it. If they had been devout Jews they would have already proven themselves to have most it not all of the meral traits necessary. They could have been ruling their houses well for yearsas was customary among the Jews. They were of a beops, who for generations had lived looking for the Messiah (Christi Aving learned from the prophets wach to that He was to be Now, they and their families learn the truth about Jesus' being the Christ and obey Him. It should hat take one with such a background long in tecome grounded in the faith and be of isaches and defending it. No, a do 195 Janes That this is now these men ancora platities on guickly. The Bible E T.

see the cheer to think that these men cour meet every qualification in such shor time.

The are a number of factors contribution to so many churches being without elders other than they simply have not had time for men to develop the qualifications.

1. There are men who need to be elders who do not want to be. They meet every other qualification except they just do not desire the office (function). It is true, that if one does not desire it he does not qualify. These men need to be impressed with the importance of this work. Having been an elder, I know how hard it is to have and keep the desire knowing that so much is expected of you. The weight of responsib-

2. These were to not need to be. These other want to be appointed to the eldership or want to do the work of eldership or want to do the work of elders minute trust appointed forms think of idea of the office is a political sense, or they intustly announce that they are running for office. These man keep good ten from coperting the office, because any know that they will constantly have to deal with these carnally ambitious men who resent the fact that they were idefected and are constantly "campaign-mg" in oremarkier for another we at the

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explaintment a good men as their re-cause throwould diminish to the own rendership role. They have a conflict of sit proking canons why this exact is not read, for elders.

3 There is the failure to (1), recognize that the Lord's kingdom is not of the world (cf. John 18:36). The government of most motitutions in the western world are democratic. This seems to work best in nations and other institutions, so why not in the church? So, being influenced by the world, brethren are more comfortable with some system where all have equal say -- so they like majority rule business meetings better than submitting to the rule of an eldership. Even where there is an eldership, they look at it as being their representatives who can only reflect the will of "those who (s)elected +' em".

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Granted that, in the absence of bulking things must get done and the Bib is silent as to how the churches reached decisions without elders. We do know they got along somehow for some time before elders were appointed. A general business meeting of the men has, over the years, proven to be expedient without violating any Biblical principle. If autitudes are good, it pretty well gets things done that must be done. Until someone comes up with some petter expedient, in the absence of elders, brethren do well to use it. Brethren should participate and help each other come to a conserve as to how to best facilitate the Lord's Acid However, it slicker be considered just an expedient of the time one project of the in is not a substitute for alders!

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eguided as the established and sensible order and divinely authorized elders be considered inexpedient. The danger of other disorders arising and becoming ingrained in a congregation is also great. Decisions are often the result of political maneuvering to get things passed in business meetings where a teenage novice may have equal voice with a brother of years experience - rather than the result the careful investigation and deliberation of men who meet God's standard for elders. Too, mere "leaders" become a substitute for elders. Younger men of ability and knowledge but without the experience and wisdom of elders are looked to more and more to manage of the work program of the church. Sometimes it falls upon a preacher, who is not an elder, to run the affairs of the congregation. These often come to relish the leadership role forced upon them by

default and take more and more upon themselves to act and speak for the church -- and are reluctant to surrender that role even after elders are appointed. "All the saints ... with the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1), can easily become "all the saints ... with the leaders and committees".

We need to encourage more and more men (and their families) to work toward the eldership as a goal. Churches need to do more to train men, not only to preach, teach, lead in public worship, but to do the work of elders. All of us need to desire that the church have elders and be willing to submit ourselves to them with due honor so that they may do their work with joy (Heb. 13:17). This might encourage more qualified men to accept the responsibility. Those who are elders need to give more attention to "ruling well", in being examples worthy to be followed, watching for souls, and not being lord over God's heritage (1 Tim. 3:5; 1 Pet. 5:2-5). This might help keep many brethren from thinking that churches get along better without elders.

No Problem

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When a person is eager to learn the way of salvation and is willing to accept the word of God as the final authority, there is no problem in teaching him what to do to be saved.

When differences arise among brethren and all have a humble attitude, and there is a sincere desire for peace and unity, and all parties want to follow God's word, the settlement is no problem.

When a person genuinely believes that Jesus is the Son of God and wants to yeild submission to Christ, once he is shown the Lord commands baptism for the remission of sins, because he is honest and longs to go to heaven, there is no problem in getting him to be baptized.

When a worshiper comes into the assembly with the right attitude of heart, there is no problem if the song leader misses the pitch on one of the hymns, or if the building is too warm, or if the janitor has missed some cobwebs over the pulpit.

Many of the problems that arise are

the bitter fruit of improper thinking.

STYLISH SAINTS

Once a man attended a fair and saw another man leading a fine, well-groomed He inquired, "Is that a saddle horse. horse?" The other replied, "No sir. This horse will buck off a saddle. can stav on his back."

"Is he a driving horse, then?" the man "No, he was hitched up once and made kindling wood of the vehicle he should have pulled."

Why is "Well, what is he good for? he here?" the man asked. The answer was. "Style, man, style. Just look at the picture he makes."

Once I was in a church building and saw people clad in fine clothes coming into the morning service. I asked the preacher, "Are those people workers in the church?" "No," he answered sadly. "Do they visit the sick and minister to the poor? Do they attend other services of the church?" "Never," said the preacher.

"There's that horse," I said to myself. "Nothing but style." -- Pulpit Helps

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sundays:

Bible Classes	9:45	a.m.
Worship	10:45	a.m.
Worship	6:00	p.m.
Wednesdays:		
Bible Class	10:00	a.m.

THE REFLECTOR (USPS 606-140) is published monthly by the Church of Christ meeting at 2005 Elkwood Drive, Fultondale, AL 35068.

Bible Classes.

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Second Class Postage Paid at Fultondale, AL 35068

7:30 p.m.