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## A Leadership Crisis

*Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.*

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*"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.

I do not have all the answers as to

It is suggested that if men cannot be found that needs and/or qualifications for elders (1 Tim. 3, Tit. 1), then the church ought to appoint those the nearest to qualified.

Others seem to want to put an arbitrary time limit on how long a church can go without elders. One preacher suggested that a good thing is that there is something going along with a church that explains why that city went without appointing elders. Well, yes, it may be not it should have had elders and will not appoint them. Then there is some thing that is wrong. Congregations, like individuals, develop at different paces. It is hardly set a definite period of time for every Christian to become a teacher (cf. Heb. 5:12-14) or be considered bad wrong is foolishness. Some may be teachers almost immediately, because they already knew a lot about the Bible. Others may need to be nurtured with the Word for years before they are able to teach. The Bible does not say that anyone who is preaching the gospel does not mean 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 develop 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 develop every thing on the list. Wait a

...discovered it now. Certainly some of these men would not have had to 'dig' from scratch in their path to qualification. Some of those converted in each place had been Jews. They would have already had a good knowledge of the Old Testament and possibly even the ability to teach it. If they had been devout Jews they would have already proven themselves to have most if not all of the moral traits necessary. They could have been ruling their houses well for years--as was customary among the Jews. They were of a people, who for generations had lived looking for the Messiah (Christ)--having learned from the prophets much of that He was to be. Now, they and their families learn the truth about Jesus being the Christ and obey Him. It should not take one with such a background long to become grounded in the faith and be able to teach and defend it. No, I do not think that this is how these men became qualified so quickly. The Bible

It is absurd for appointing elders and  
and a corner for himself. Surely we can  
see from the above that it is not even  
unreasonable to think that these men  
could meet every qualification in such  
short time.

There are a number of factors contributing 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 responsi-



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

*Irvin Himmell*

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 yield 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.

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## STYLISH SAINTS

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Once a man attended a fair and saw another man leading a fine, well-groomed horse. He inquired, "Is that a saddle horse?" The other replied, "No sir. This horse will buck off a saddle. Nothing can stay on his back."

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

"Well, what is he good for? Why is 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*

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## 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. |
| Bible Classes. .... | 7:30 p.m.  |

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