



## NO ELDERS

By J. R. Snell

Lack of leadership within a great number of congregations is tragic. Men who are qualified, and/or are qualifying themselves are in so many instances nonexistent. The tragedy of this is compounded when we so often are forced to accept the fact that the potential is obviously lacking. This, as I see it, is the greatest hindrance to congregational growth and strength. In the absence of qualified elders, operation and function is reduced to a situation where "everyone's business is no-one's business". The result is usually floundering and blundering, with the decision making process reduced to periodic business meetings of men in a congregation and no real spiritual care and concern for the flock being evidenced. Where this type of situation prevails corrective measures need to be instituted.

In the New Testament times congregations obviously existed for a time without elders. To acknowledge this is to accept a developing and maturing period in infant and newly established churches. However, this is not to be seen as a permanent situation. As Paul and others planted the gospel in various places they shortly returned to give scriptural organization to these churches. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed". How long is a church to exist before appointing elders? The answer obviously is, until qualified men are available. Now, we are getting to the real issue. Why do some churches have such a difficult time qualifying men for elders? Several observations may be in order.

The preeminence factor is evident in some instances. Novice Christians, men who for various reasons are not and cannot qualify bask in a sense of self importance which they are sometimes unwilling to relinquish. To share equally in the decision making process is a position they tenaciously hold to. Such most often generates a hypercritical attitude which refuses to see anyone qualified and is quick to reject anyone in consideration. Where legitimate and scriptural disqualification is established, well and good, but we here speak of something else.

Others, have so miserably failed to exemplify the qualities and characteristics of godliness and respect required for an elder. It may be an individual who teaches and identifies with truth verbally but in life there is such an obvious gap between saying and doing that he cannot lead the flock. Consistency between say and do, teaching and practice, is vital to one's worth in the kingdom of God and as an elder and

leader especially. Examples to the flock, as one of the requirements in elders and potential elders is certainly to be reckoned with. One who has not jealously and zealously guarded against saying one thing and doing another, seemingly thinking his teaching is applicable only to the other, is in reality a drawback to the course of righteousness.

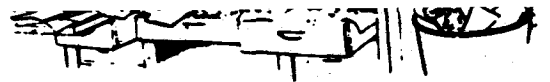
In others there is such a deficiency in knowledge and understanding of truth they are not and will not be teachers able to "feed the flock" and "convict the gainsayer". Someone has said, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing". Nowhere is this more evident than in the church. Elders are not to be men who simply think they know but men who have proven their knowledge and understanding through the righteous fruit of their life and teaching.

In other cases there is just not enough genuine concern and interest on the part of the church to encourage and promote the development of men. Within the men themselves there is no real "desire" to thus serve the Lord. This results in following the lines of least resistance individually and collectively and the lack of leadership continues. Maybe this is an area needing emphasis. Men potentially qualified who will not rise to the need of the hour and finish the job of qualifying themselves will surely have to answer to God for failure to use talents.

The problem of leadership or scriptural organization, the lack of it, will not be corrected anywhere until men within the affected churches want to resolve it. Want to bad enough to allow the Lord to take charge of their lives and develop themselves to the point of qualification. This will mean attaining to knowledge and understanding of the scriptures. Applying those principles thus learned in life will produce godliness in character and actions, a good home relationship with properly trained children and a loving and submissive wife. It will cause men to respect and honor such faithfulness in action. An automatic bond of trust and confidence will develop as this kind of godliness produces a magnetism and fellowship that is unquestionably productive of good. To such, men rally and follow, and when the specifics of elder qualification are present you have what God planned.

Let us awaken to the need for leadership, qualified men to serve within the congregation. Let each rise above pettiness, selfishness, egotism, and if there be any other like hindrance, and work zealously to bring self to the ultimate of potential. Let each be all he or she can be to the glory of God.

# EDITOR'S DESK



Churches of Christ, those after the New Testament pattern, are autonomous units. Each manages its own affairs. If one makes a blunder all should not be charged. I thank God that this is so, because I would hate to know that this congregation were responsible for some of the actions of some churches of Christ. I suspect that those brethren are glad they are not responsible for our blunders.

Though we, as independent units have the right and responsibility to make our own decisions without having to ask another church's permission to act - all of us are engaged in promoting the cause of the "common faith". Cooperation with and consideration of the interests of sister congregations is both scriptural, wise and in order. It seems to us that a genuine interest in the over-all good of the Lord's Cause and a genuine love for the brotherhood would preclude any congregation doing anything that would obviously (in the judgment of mature and reasonable brethren) not be in the best interest of all -- in order to preserve some self-centered interest of that single congregation.

When brethren act with such inconsideration and poor judgment, they need not be surprized that faithful brethren in the area look upon their actions with less than full enthusiasm - even if they are "doctrinally" sound!

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I am impressed with YOUNG PEOPLE who have attended meeting that I have been engaged in this year. One place we announced that we would preach on "worldliness" - even specifying the items to be covered - and several pews were filled with young people from the area. Though we specified "mixed swimming", "dancing", "social drinking", "shorts wearing", etc. - not one young person showed any negative reaction, but on the contrary several told us of their appreciation and commented that they heard very little about these matters from preachers. Some said they wish their friends could have heard it.

At another place we had young men to come by after the sermon and explain that the reason that they did not attend every night (these were not members of the congregation where the meeting was being conducted) was because there were so many meetings in the area that they wanted to attend them all.

I believe many, many young people are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. They are eager to hear gospel sermons, not just on a few topics, but "all things commanded". Parents, elders, and preachers need to take note of this fact and quit running scared that strong teaching will somehow alienate their young folks. It may be that they are crying out for bread and we are giving them a stone.

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We are hearing of more and more PREACHERS WHO ARE "THROWING IN THE TOWEL" as far as full-time preaching is concerned. Some may be doing it for economic reasons. Others may be doing it for egotistical reasons - feel they are not getting the credit they are due. Some may be doing it to gain stability - tired of uprooting their families every few years (or months). We think these need to re-evaluate their attitudes toward money, themselves, and real security. Maybe a little thinking about real sacrifice might be in order.

But, most of those whom I have talked with recently, who have decided that "part-time" preaching was the better route to go, have not turned from "full-time" work for any of the above reasons. The stress of having to work under pressure of the modern concept of preaching that has evolved among us - of trying to meet the "expectations" of brethren with this concept. It is just a generally accepted "expectation" that a full-time preacher is supposed to spark numerical growth, keep the contribution moving ahead, and generally handle any problems that may develop from day to day. His success or failure at a given congregation is usually measured by these things. His study, knowledge, aptness to (really) teach and his efforts to save the lost, restore the backslider and strengthen the weak get shoved into the background - and such things as getting the attendance up (by becoming a church cheer leader), increasing and meeting the budget annually, and public relations visitation becomes paramount. He is expected to create conditions to meet these ends and his success or failure is generally viewed in these terms - often by himself and others. When one is constantly falling short of these "expectations" the pressure finally gets to be too much and he simply "throws in the towel".

Brethren, if you are in fellowship with a good preacher working full-time in your midst, read your Bible and see what was expected of New Testament preachers - expect that and nothing more. Brother, if you are preaching "full-time" read your Bible and expect that and nothing more of yourself. Isn't it about time we went back to expecting that preachers "preach the word...in season and out", looking upon them as men with whom we are in fellowship (partnership) in the gospel and not as hired office managers and/or promotional personnel? Expect them to visit the sick and unfortunate just like you or any other Christian - not as a hired P R man and/or social services director for the church? If we would do this and let any growth and publicity come as a result of zealously teaching the word - the church would be far better off and there would be less preachers looking for secular work.

# THE WAY WITH WORDS

By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Words are mischievous little fellows at times. They may mean one thing in one sentence and something different in the next. They may have different meanings from generation to generation. "Prevent" (Ps. 119:147; 1 Thess. 4:15) and "let" (Rom. 13) are good examples of how words have changed meanings since the King James Version was translated. They now mean to "preceed" and "hinder" respectively.

I once had a little difficulty explaining to a brother that a certain couple was not having domestic problems because the wife had confessed at church that she had "left her first love". Have you ever heard that Cornelius was a musician because he was in the "Italian BAND"?

Speakers (and writers), especially in spiritual matters, should choose their words carefully, wisely, and accurately. Otherwise, they may mislead souls and/or fall prey to those who desire "to catch (them) in (their) words." (See Mark 12:13). No wonder James wrote, "My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation...if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." (Jas.3:1,2).

Hearers (and readers) also have a responsibility. One should try to understand exactly what the other person is saying. Be honest. Be fair. Even if one's words are, in our judgement, poorly chosen - would it not be better to try to understand what he means? Could it not be that his wording is not really so bad, but just different from the way we would have said it? Could it be that there are other meanings of the word familiar to him but not to us?

If we hear a strange word, a good dictionary might help us. If we hear a familiar word used in an unfamiliar way, see

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## SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

### SUNDAY:

Bible classes .....9:45 A.M.  
Worship..... 10:45 A.M.  
Worship..... 6:00 P.M.

### WEDNESDAY:

Bible Classes..... 7:30 P.M.

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if it may not indeed be so used. A given word may have several meanings in different places - but not several meanings in the same place.

"Baptism", in most modern dictionaries, means: to sprinkle, pour, or immerse. But, what did the Bible writers mean by the word? Faced with all the evidence, one must conclude that they meant immersion. Bible descriptions also point to immersion ("Buried...in baptism - Rom. 6:4). While it may have all three meanings today, to be honest we must seek to find out what the Lord and the inspired writers meant by the word.

I do not want to minimize the importance of giving attention to the exact wording of speakers and writers. Jesus made an important argument on the very tense of a verb: "I AM (not WAS) the God of Abraham...of Isaac...of Jacob" (Matt. 22:32). Therefore, those patriarchs must have been living at the time the words were spoken - long after their physical deaths. Paul made an argument on the difference between the singular and plural (Gal. 3:16).

However, it is possible to "strive about words to no profit" (2 Tim. 2:14). It is possible for us to attribute what WE mean by a word or phrase to another without considering what HE may have meant by the word or words. It seems to me that honesty, fairness and charity demands that we first try to understand what HE means before taking issue too strongly with him.

I once sat in a Bible class where the whole class period was given to pointedly arguing the difference between believing "IN Christ" and believing "ON Christ". One position was that "ON Christ" meant a faith that did not lead to obedience, while "IN Christ" meant obedient faith - since it takes obedience to get "IN" Christ. The fact that we pointed out that the King James version of John 3:16 reads "IN him", and the American Standard reads "ON him" did little to calm the argument.

In a business meeting time was consumed arguing over the wording of proposed new sign to be erected on the lawn of the meeting house. Some insisted that "Church Of Christ" was sufficient, others agreed proving "church" was spelled with a little "c". Some contended for "The Church of Christ"; others said it should be "The Church of Christ Meets Here"; another contended that it should be "A Church of Christ Meets Here", since it was not the only church (congregation) of Christ in the world. But I think I had a better suggestion: "Some Of The (Or A, As The Case May Be) Church (Little "c", If You Prefer) Of Christ Meets Here Some Of The Time", since I

have never known them all to be there at one time!

When folks used to tell me they were "going to church", I was quick to correct them. It was fine to say "going to worship", but "going to church" was out. But, someone was kind enough to point out that "church" is used for the assembly in which brethren worship (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:34,35). Who would object to saying "going to the assembly"?

"Oh, that is just your INTERPRETATION", has been the often used response to our pointing folks to what the Bible says. So, when one professes to "interpret" the Scriptures it leaves a bad taste with us. Now it is alright to "explain" a verse, but we must never "interpret" it. But, one meaning of "interpret" is "to give an explanation". You see, it is alright for "our preachers" to "explain" a passage as long as he does not "interpret" it. Could it be that we have become so hidebound to a particular way of expressing a thought that we will not allow a synonym to be used without raising a racket over it? Maybe someone can "explain" to me how one can teach Romans, Hebrews, and Revelations without just a wee bit of "interpreting". Now if one's interpretation is a misinterpretation then that is an entirely different matter.

In recent months we have been reading some controversy between some old friends (maybe I should explain what I mean by OLD, Oh, well, just forget that!) over when and how God forgives His children. Also on the matter of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I have noticed too much of a tendency on the part of all sides to pick up words and phrases and give meanings to them that I know that the others did not mean by the words. If a brother disavows a meaning that we have attributed to him, wouldn't it be far better to accept his explanation than to continue to insist that he accept the consequences of a meaning that he disavows?

It is easy to develop a one-track mind about certain words and phrases and jump to wrong conclusions. We may even find ourselves measuring a brother's soundness by our PERSONAL choice of words. We might find ourselves in perfect agreement with each other once we understand what the other means by his words. Let's try to be responsible both as speakers and listeners, as writers and readers.

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## PREACHERS

By Robert Turner

We have heard of a business meeting where some disgruntled members presented the

elders with the reasons for wanting to change preachers. One offered, "My daughter says he preaches too long." The elders weren't too impressed with that, but suggested they might ask the man to plan his lessons for a better use of time.

A second complained, "But my wife says he preaches too loud." The elders thought they might turn down the public address system and solve that weighty problem.

And the third said, "The bad thing is, the liberals just don't like him." Well now, that is going to be a bit harder to handle. Makes me think of a bumper sticker. "Get a taste of Religion - BITE A PREACHER". The man who devotes his full time to preaching the gospel deserves better than that.

There are bound to be good and bad preachers - and some who should be doing something else. But aside from the "professionals", and the con-men who think it is an easy way of making a living, preachers are a pretty decent lot. With the education, drive, and self-confidence necessary to make a reasonable successful preacher, a man can make more money and have a less demanding life doing something else. That is why those who are in it for the money usually drop out in eight or ten years and get into some other field. (and the quicker, the better - EOB)

It takes a good man, Charlie Brown, to get right on doing research, preparing the sort of lessons you and your elders feel are most needed, and presenting them to an audience of note-passing teenagers, sleeping parents, ceiling-gazing gum-chewers, and a liberal sprinkling of crying babies and their struggling mothers. More than once I have had the temptation to close the book and shout, "OK you win, you can have it!"

And then I see the sober, thoughtful look on this teenager; the nod of approval on that parent; and a young mother comes to me after service with an apology for her child, and a request for my outline so she can study it when the child sleeps. If there are problems that fret and discourage us, there are also people who need the Lord, and are appreciative of your efforts to bring the two of them together. When you speak of good and bad preachers - remember the good and bad people they work with, and the fact that, despite rumors to the contrary, PREACHERS ARE PEOPLE.

Mothers and Dads, encourage your boys to accept the challenge of the greatest "service" job on earth.

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