

The Reflector



A LEADERSHIP VACUUM

The only Scripturally authorized persons to “take (exercise) the oversight” of churches of Christ are *elders* (1 Pet. 5:2). These are mature men with the knowledge, wisdom, experience, and character traits needed to adequately lead congregations. They have gained the knowledge by study, the wisdom by spiritual exercise, and the experience by ruling their own houses well. Read 1 Tim. 3:1-6 and Tit. 1:5-9 for all the qualifications of elders.

A plurality of such men in every church should be sought out and appointed as soon as possible. Within no more than three years after preaching the gospel in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, Paul returned to them and “appointed elders in every church”. (Acts 14:21-23).

The longer churches go and the larger they grow without elders in place, the stronger the leadership vacuum becomes. It is likely that some kind of substitute leadership will be drawn into the void created by the obvious need for someone to manage congregational affairs.

Without elders to oversee, churches must, of necessity, turn to some expedient way to reach a consensus in things they need to do as a unit. A general business meeting of the men is a good time-proven way of doing this. When properly conducted, I know of no scriptural principle that it violates. Until someone comes up with some better and more equitable way, in the absence of elders, this practice will likely continue among churches.

Yet, at it's very best, this is a temporary arrangement with many pitfalls and frustrations. Under this arrangement, in most cases, the weakest brother, in knowledge, wisdom and experience, has as much “say” (and sometimes much more) about which direction the church goes as the most spiritually mature man in the congregation. Since there is no one “in charge”, such a one feels that he has as much right to insist on his judgment's being followed as anyone

Often, under this arrangement, unsuitable substitute leaders emerge, filling the vacuum created by a lack of an eldership. Sometimes standing committees are appointed to do the work that only elders are qualified to do. As the years pass without elders and deacons, these committees become permanent fixtures. The church is then led (ruled, managed, overseen) by men who have been thrust (either by design or accident) by default into a leadership role for which they are unqualified.

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else. And since they are discussing matters of judgment, other brethren do not feel that they have the authority to insist that their judgment be followed rather than his—even though they may think poorly of his judgment. Hence, such important judgment decisions as to who should occupy the pulpit week after week is often dominated by spiritually weak, but vocally strong brethren who have managed to control the business meetings. Even such delicate matters as administering church discipline is often dominated by the judgment of novices. The larger a church becomes, the more acute this problem becomes.

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Let us look at some undesirable ways churches are sometimes led (or ruled) without an eldership:

❶ **The Leadership of Intimidation.** A strong personality or two, with a lot of native leadership ability, but lacking the spiritual knowledge and

experience, and otherwise far from being qualified for the eldership, may step in and assume or be willingly given the oversight of a church. Good brethren are so intimidated by the strength of such a personality that they know of nothing to do but sit back and let him have his way. Such persons become kind of *defacto* elders. Preachers are sometimes among them.

• The Leadership Of Politics.

We have lived so long under a political system in civil affairs that is based on majority vote that we think this is good for the church. Under this kind of system the majority rules and leadership becomes a popularity contest. When adopted by the church, this creates a situation where the judgement of a young teen-aged brother, or some other novice, is given as much weight as the most experienced brother in the congregation. It also gives rise to base politicking. Some brother wants his pet project approved by the majority ruled "business meeting", so he begins to round up votes to put the measure through the next meeting. This all too often promotes parties, divisions and feelings of resentment by those who have been out-politicked and out-voted by the opposition. Under this system those who are able to court their way into popularity often emerge as the real leaders of the church.

• The Leadership of Objection.

A proposal that is desired by, and in the judgement of 99% of the brethren would be good for the church, is often dropped or indefinitely delayed because one or two people object. More often than not, it is not really a matter of conscience, but merely a matter of preference. No scriptural objection is offered. The objector just likes it a certain way. It matters little to him how many others may feel differently about the matter, he feels that his judgment should prevail.

Since he is so adamant and, after all, *it is a matter of judgement*, brethren simply yield to his wishes and drop the matter — or postpone a decision until he can be persuaded to drop his objection. It is kind of like the hung-jury concept when one juror cannot be persuaded to yield. The case may have to be thrown out and



"I THINK WE NEED TO PUMP A LITTLE LIFE INTO OUR CLASS..."

tried again latter. This may be frustrating to the rest of us, but it seems better than alienating one, who feels he has as much right to his judgment as anyone, especially since there are no overseers. Remember we are talking about matters that are generally accepted to be matters of preference rather than principle. Yet, while the majority of the brethren are to be commended for their willingness to defer the item, rather than alienate the objector over a matter of judgment, there ought to be a better way than letting one or two self-willed objectors rule the roost. But, such is the price we often pay when there is a leadership vacuum caused by no eldership.

If there were a good eldership in place, unwilling to "lord it over" others, they could discuss the matter with the objector, giving it due consideration. The objector might even persuade them that his objection was in the best interest of the church. However, if they, in their collective judgment, still felt that it was in the best interest of the church to proceed in spite of the objection, they could and should do so. If the objector is still adamant they can remind him of his scriptural obligation to:

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (Ileb. 13:17 *King James Version*)

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an

account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. (*New International*)

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." (*New King James*)

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this *were* unprofitable for you. (*American Standard*)

So, while a good eldership will not "lord it over" (1 Pet. 5:3) the church, they will take or exercise the oversight that God gives them and not let every petty objector over-rule their judgment.

No, elders are not infallible. They make mistakes. They are uninspired human beings. But their qualifications make them more likely to make good judgment calls in spiritual matters than most — besides they have authority from God to "exercise the oversight". No one else has this authority.

Yes, I know that there are brethren who are not comfortable with the idea that elders have any authority over the church, especially in the area of making decisions. How elders can "rule", "oversee", "shepherd" without making decisions on behalf of the flock is beyond my comprehension. They have some kind of authority to which brethren are bound by the Lord to submit or obey. Read again carefully the various versions on Heb. 13:17 and 1 Pet. 5:1-5. How can they lead a church without *deciding* which way it will go? Of course, like any other over-under relationship, brethren are not bound to follow or obey elders in things that would cause them to be disobeying God.

Brethren, let us fervently pray that men will work harder at qualifying themselves for the work of overseeing the church and that brethren will work more diligently in looking out such men from among them and appoint them to this much needed work — so that leadership vacuums, along with their attending difficulties, will disappear from among the churches of our Lord. —By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

BEWARE!

We would use the term, "watch out." The term speaks to the fact of impending peril, and issues warning, in order to avoid loss. It is used in Colossians 2:8 -- "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ." Again, we are warned by Christ in Matthew 7:15 -- "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."

In these two passages we are told to be careful and beware about what we are taught. We are warned that we can be led astray by those who appear to have our best interest at heart. Often, those we admire, can lead us into heresy and we may not even know it, because we are prejudiced by their good traits.

I have been a member of the church for 25 years and in a preacher's household for 37. I have watched and observed my father fret over having to deal with false teachers, I have watched him be demeaned, and be accused of lack of love because he stood his ground on Truth and would not back up. The observations of Christ and of Paul are very accurate and are still true. We should be ever aware of the possibility that we, or someone we love, may teach false doctrine and draw others away from their hope. In the time I have been a Christian, I have observed the tactics of false teachers, and have listened to sound brethren more seasoned than I am in their description of false teaching and its pattern.

Let us notice some attributes of false teaching.

False Teaching

1. *Often portrays itself as uncertain.* Error claims to be a learning process, but it never comes to a steady

fast conclusion (2 Tim. 3:7). Error teaches by questioning, never takes a position that can be attributed definitely. It allows others to always wonder what the belief is.

2. *False teaching is often done by those who view themselves as the free-thinkers of the day* (Acts 17:21). In this passage we see the Athenians were forever interested in "some new thing." One who teaches false doctrine often sees himself as an innovator, one who rejects all the "traditional ideas," and is willing to mold for himself some new doctrine. Many of the young men I went to school with followed this pattern and are now in apostasy.

3. *False teaching is deceitful.* It

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does not advertise itself as dangerous and often on the surface seems innocent. When it is discovered for what it is and is challenged, it often goes underground until conditions are safe to surface again. Those who followed Holt, Ketcherside, and Fudge were told not to reveal what they believed all at once, but to keep people wondering and unsure. Matthew 7:15 tells us that it appears as innocent as a lamb.

4. *False teaching turns people against one another.* It divides, shatters and splinters until a full path of destruction is laid. Then, sadly, there are some sad soldiers on the edges of the battlefield, who stand and wring their hands, and wonder what happened, and remember when someone

admonished them to stand or be consumed, but it is too late!

5. *False teaching would like for every issue to be a "matter of judgment."* It would have you believe that vital issues that are matters of doctrine are minor points, and that "we all come out at the same place anyhow, so what is the big deal?" Does that sound to you like your Baptist friend, when spoken to about baptism? He will say, "We both believe in baptism, what difference does it make, whether or not it is for remission of sins?" The live-and-let-live philosophy is gendered by false teaching. Sympathizers with false teaching often are "milktoast" Christians who will not agree with the error, but will not take an active stand against it. This makes them a partaker of the evil deeds accomplished by false doctrine (2 Jn. 9-11).

6. *False teaching often portrays itself as being misunderstood.* "You didn't hear me right", or "I didn't mean it." We all know that as humans we will slip and misspeak, occasional-

ly, but when we develop a pattern of telling folks we have been misunderstood, we are either involved in false teaching, or do not know what we are talking about, and ought to keep quiet and not advertise our doubts as doctrine. Much harm is done in the church because Christians get together to "study" and all that occurs is a mass pooling of ignorance, with everyone leaving more confused than when he came, but "feeling good," because we have "studied without the shackles of tradition."

All Christians should beware of false doctrine and be unafraid to oppose it. In order to do this we must be studious (2 Tim. 2:15). We must be

aware of the tactics of error, and be unafraid as David was when he met Goliath. When error is espoused, it is a slap in the face of our Savior, who died to bring us salvation and hope, not confusion and uncertainty. That should make us upset! I have never

been accused of liking a fight. I have always done what I could to avoid one, but that does not mean indignation cannot come to the front when Truth is challenged. Beware! and put your armor on! (Eph. 6:10-18). —By Stan Adams in *Guardian of Truth*, June 21, 1990.

"THAT SETTLES IT"

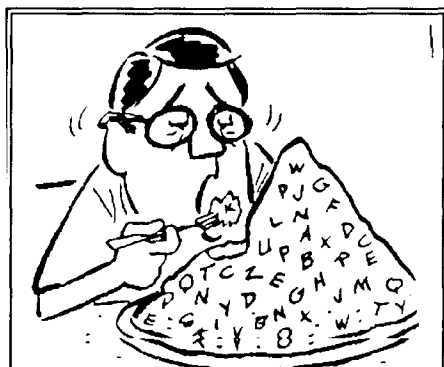
While driving around a town where I used to live. I sometimes would see a bumper sticker on some cars that read, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." Sometimes I wondered if the driver of the car really believed what was said on this sticker, especially when there were other stickers on the car promoting premillennial themes, Calvinistic themes, and other false ideas. Nevertheless, the sentiment expressed on this bumper sucker is one that we need to think about. When God says something does that really settle it for us?

If we recognize God as the supreme authority, then what he says does settle it for us. I remember when I was growing up that my numerous siblings and I would sometimes get into a big argument, I know that is

hard for you to believe, but we did. My dad would hear this going and enter into the "discussion" and make some sort of judgment and proclamation and that settled it. Why did his word settle it? Because he was the supreme authority in our house. We understood this to be so. There was no sense in discussing it further. When God tells us something, we need to realize His supreme authority and let that settle it for us.

I am afraid, however, that for many what God says does not settle it. God has spoken in the matter of salvation (Mk 16:16; Acts 2:38). But that doesn't settle it. Many want to devise their own plans and schemes for salvation. God has spoken in the matter of creation (Gen. 1). But that doesn't settle it. Everyone has his own theory as to how everything got here. God has spoken in the matter of marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:1-9). But that doesn't settle it. Many even those who claim to be Christians, want to find some way around what God has said. We could go on and on.

Does what God says settle it for you, or are you looking for some other source of authority in your life. —By Edward O. Bragwell, Jr. from *The Examiner*, Greenwood, Ms.



I'm careful of the words I say
To keep them soft and sweet;
I never know from day to day
Which ones I'll have to eat.

—Author Unknown

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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