

A Doctrinal and
Practical Study of the
Leadership Role of Elders

church
LEADERSHIP
and
ORGANIZATION

By

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CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION
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PREFACE

In *Why Churches Grow*, I reported the results of survey research showing that the net growth rate in the churches of Christ has been declining steadily for the past 15 years. It is evident that there must be a bottleneck somewhere. Every bottleneck that I have ever seen was right at the top of the bottle. I believe that the same thing is true in the churches of Christ. Problems associated with the eldership, in my judgment, are the most serious problems faced by the churches of Christ.

This book is intended as an in-depth study of church leadership. The focus is almost totally on the eldership. In addition to a careful study of the Bible matters on faith, this book also presents practical suggestions for improvements in matters of method.

The message of this book is intended for serious students of church leadership. It is intended for those who are already serving as elders and deacons, for those who want to prepare for such service, for preachers who are charged with the responsibility of "setting in order the things that are lacking" (Titus 1:5), and for any Christian who is interested in the study of church organization and leadership.

Having served both as a preacher and as an elder, I tend to see the problems of church leadership from a perspective somewhat different from that of those who have served in only one or in neither of these positions. In this book, I have tried to take a middle path between what I see as two extremes that are equally wrong and equally dangerous. The authoritarian style of leadership in which elders lord it over the church is wrong and needs to be changed. But the false doctrines of those who would change the structure of church organization are equally wrong and must also be resisted.

*Tulsa, Oklahoma
July 1979*

1986 PREFACE UP-DATE

The way this book has been received since its publication over six years ago has been most gratifying. Two points, however, need to be clarified.

Some critics have claimed that this book teaches a doctrine which requires each elder to be reviewed by the members every few years. That is not what I said. What I said and still believe is that to lead effectively and Scripturally, an elder needs to know that he has the consent of the members. One way to do this is to have each elder ask the members from time to time, "Do you want me to continue serving as an elder?" If the congregation says "No," that elder should step aside and serve in other ways. If the congregation says "Yes," that elder's leadership is greatly strengthened by the knowledge that he still has the support of the members. This, however, is just one of the many possible ways for elders to know that they have the continuing support of the members.

On a related matter, this book suggests a two-step approach to the selection of elders that I no longer recommend. I suggested that the members be asked to list those whom they recognize as being qualified to serve as elders and then have an opportunity to raise any Scriptural objections regarding a person's qualifications. Then I suggested that the members be asked if they are willing to follow the leadership of each man still being considered. I now realize that this two-step approach could cause hurt feelings if someone is recognized as being qualified, but the members say that they are not willing to follow his leadership. There is a much better approach. The members can be asked to list all of those whom they recognize as being qualified and whom they are willing to follow as elders. The congregation can be told that it is important for each member to list each man that member believes is qualified and whom that member is willing to follow—since the number of times a man's name is submitted will be taken as an indication of his support or lack of support. Of course, there still should be an opportunity for any member to raise a Scriptural objection regarding qualifications, but this one-step approach gets at the issue of consent without the hurt feelings that can come if a congregation is unwilling to follow a man they admit is qualified.

Abilene, Texas
January, 1986

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr. is the Director of the Church Growth Institute at Abilene Christian University. He has served in this position since June 1, 1984. The Church Growth Institute is a part of ACU's College of Biblical Studies. The Institute's work is focused on conducting church growth research and providing growth-related services to local congregations. These services include diagnostic church growth studies, consulting, and seminars on church growth, leadership, and related topics.

Prior to the move to ACU, Dr. Yeakley served for ten years as the Chairman of the Speech Communication Program at the University of Tulsa where he was an Associate Professor of Communication. While in Tulsa, he served for two years as an elder. Prior to 1974, he served for over 20 years as a full-time gospel preacher.

Dr. Yeakley began his college education at Abilene Christian College in 1952. Through the years, as he preached for various congregations, he attended seven state universities. In 1970, he received his B.A. degree in Psychology from the University of Houston. He received his M.A. degree in Speech from the University of Houston in 1972. His Ph.D. degree in Speech Communication from the University of Illinois was conferred in 1975.

In the decade of 1974-1984, Dr. Yeakley worked as a professional consultant in organizational communication. He has done research, consulting, and training work with government agencies, professional organizations, and many of the nation's largest corporations. For ten years, he taught courses in Organizational Communication, Communication Theory, Communication Research, and other subjects directly relevant to the practical applications suggested in this book.

Flavil and Maydell Yeakley have three grown children. Mark, his wife Kim, their son, Ryan, and their daughter, Rachel, live in Ponca City, Oklahoma, where Mark works with Conoco and serves as a deacon in the Grand Avenue Church of Christ. Steven and his wife Shelley live in Abilene, Texas,

where Steven is doing graduate work at ACU—anticipating graduation and the birth of their first child in May of 1986. Becky and her husband Gene Vinzant also live in Abilene, Texas, where Gene is doing graduate work at ACU preparing for mission work in Brazil beginning in 1988. Flavil's parents, Flavil R. Yeakley, Sr. and Mary (Klingman) Yeakley, live in Gustine, Texas, where Flavil Sr. serves as one of the elders of the Lord's church having recently retired after 60 years in the pulpit.

DEDICATION

To Maydell (Jeffries) Yeakley, whose help and encouragement as a faithful wife for over a quarter of a century and whose faithful Christian service as a preacher's wife, elder's wife, and now as a professor's wife has made the work that produced this book possible and meaningful, with the prayer that she will "Come grow old with me. The best is yet to be: The last of life for which the first was made."

To Mark Yeakley, with the prayer that some day he will be the kind of elder discussed in this book.

To Steven Yeakley, with the prayer that he will preach the word and serve the cause of Christ in every way he can.

To Rebecca Yeakley, with the prayer that she will always faithfully teach and practice the will of God.

To my father, Flavil R. Yeakley, Sr., an elder of the Lord's church who has served faithfully as a gospel preacher for over 50 years, for all the help he has been to me.

To my mother, Mary (Klingman) Yeakley, whose faithful Christian service as a preacher's wife and now as an elder's wife has set for me an inspiring example.

And most of all, to Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd. To Him be the glory in all things.

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Chapter

1

THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN OF CHURCH ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

“God is not the author of confusion” (I Cor. 14:33). The arrangement, design, and organization of the natural world clearly show that the God who created the universe is a God of order. The unity and harmony of the Bible clearly show that the God who inspired the Bible is a God of order. It would indeed be most unlikely that such a God would establish a church without any order. There must be some kind of organization and leadership in the church or else there will be anarchy and confusion.

Although there is almost universal agreement throughout Christendom that there must be some kind of organization and leadership in the church, there is no general agreement as to what form that organization should take or how church leaders should function. Before we can answer these questions, there is a more basic issue to consider. We must first ask how we will find the answers to these questions. We must consider the source of authority to be used in such a study.

The Source of Authority in the Study of Church Organization and Leadership

Catholics claim that we must be guided by the traditions of the church. Protestants generally claim that we must use our own judgment in determining which form of church organization to use. But we need to ask whether or not tradition or human judgment are supposed to guide us in matters of faith and practice in the church. As we consider these matters, we need to remember that it is God's church that we are talking about. The first thing that we should do,

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therefore, is to see what God's inspired word says on this matter of authority.

Jesus is Lord

Jesus Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Jesus said, "All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Mat. 28:18). Jesus taught that human tradition and human judgment should not guide us in religion (Mat. 15:6-9). Ways that seem right to man sometimes are wrong (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). In matters of faith and practice in the church, man is not capable of directing his own steps (Jer. 10:23).

Since Jesus Christ has all authority (Mat. 28:18), that must include the authority to delegate authority. Jesus sent the apostles into all the world with the authority to preach the gospel (Mat. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13). The apostles received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). One of the apostles said "His divine power has granted unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (II Pet. 1:3). When the apostles spoke, what they said was not the word of man, but the word of God (I Thess. 2:13; II Pet. 1:21). The apostles had authority (II Cor. 10:8; I Thess. 2:6). The apostles still exercise their authority through the written record that they left for us in the books of the New Testament. Peter said that he knew that he would die soon and he wanted Christians to have a record of the things God had revealed to him (II Pet. 1:12-15). Notice that as Peter said this, he was writing one of the New Testament books. That inspired written word, according to the apostle Paul, "is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. 3:16-17).

The authority of Jesus Christ is expressed through the Bible. The New Testament contains the pattern for the church to follow until the Lord returns (I Pet. 4:11; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19; cf. Deut. 4:2; 12:32). As we seek to discover God's plan for church organization and leadership, we must go back to the Bible.

Search the Scriptures

As we study the subject of church organization and leadership, we must search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). In our study we must give diligence to present ourselves approved unto God as workmen who do not need to be ashamed since we are rightly dividing, handling aright, or holding a straight course in the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15).

The first requirement for those who seek to learn the will of God is that they approach the study of the Bible with an open mind. Too many people make up their minds what they want to believe, teach, and practice, and then they go to the Bible to find some way of justifying what they have already decided. Such people will not learn God's will (Ezek. 14:4; II Thess. 2:10-12).

In order to understand the Bible, you need to study it the same way you would study any other book. Liberals interpret passages figuratively if a literal interpretation would call for anything super-natural. Fundamentalists insist that every passage must be interpreted literally. The logical approach between these extremes is to take the Bible at face value and interpret it literally unless there is something in the text itself that indicates that a figurative meaning is intended. There are important questions to ask about any passage: Who said it? When was it said? To whom was it said? How was it said? What else is said on the same subject? There are two important logical principles of interpretation that must be applied: "the law of inclusion" and "the law of exclusion." These are not Bible laws, but they are laws of interpretation that are applied in understanding other messages and they must be applied to understand the message of the Bible.

Jesus said "Go into all the world," but He did not tell us how to go. That general instruction in the absence of any specific details is all the authority that we need for going by car, bus, train, plane, ship, or any other method of transportation. That is the law of inclusion.

When God told Noah to build an ark, he gave certain detailed specifications. Among those specifications, God told Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood. God did not

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have to list all other possible kinds of wood and say specifically, "Don't use fir, don't use pine, don't use oak, etc." When God specified one kind of wood, that automatically excluded all other kinds of wood. That is the law of exclusion.

As we study the subject of church organization and leadership, we will find some areas where God told us what to do, but He did not say how we were to do it. In those cases, the *what* is a matter of faith and the *how* is a matter of judgment. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). A matter of faith is, by definition, a matter on which the word of God has given us specific instructions. A matter of judgment, by contrast, is a matter on which the word of God has not given us specific instructions. As long as the methods we use are nothing more than ways of doing what God has authorized, then we have God's authority for using our own judgment in selecting the method. But as we study church organization and leadership, we will also find some matters in which God has given us not only the general instructions about *what* we are to do, He has also given us some specific instruction about *how* we are to do it. In those cases, we do not have the right to use our own judgment and select some other method.

God wants the church to be united in all matters of faith (John 17:21; I Cor. 1:10-13). But just as God wants us to have unity in all matters of faith, God also wants us to have liberty and tolerance in matters of judgment. The church is the body of Christ. We must never make the mistake of exchanging the true body of Christ for some human substitute. But by the same token, we must not restrict the liberty God wants us to have within that one body. A body has many different members that perform many different functions in many different ways and a body must have this diversity if it is to function. Furthermore, a body must be able to grow, change, and adapt itself to its environment if it is to survive. We must never change in matters of faith or else we will cease to be the body of Christ, but we must always be free to change in matters of judgment (I Cor. 12:12-27).

The Danger of Extremism

In popular use, "conservatism" means holding to what

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we now have, while “liberalism” means a willingness to change. Christians ought to be conservative in matters of faith and liberal in matters of judgment. God told Joshua, “Be strong and very courageous to observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left that you may have good success wherever you go” (Josh. 1:7). Right wing extremists are conservative in matters of judgment or opinion where liberty and tolerance should be allowed. Left wing extremists are liberal in matters of faith where strict obedience and unity should be required. Right wing extremists treat the word of man as though it has as much authority as the word of God. They bind their traditions and customs on all others in the church as though these were laws from God. Thus they make laws where God has made no law and forbid what God did not forbid. Left wing extremists treat the word of God as though it had no more authority than the word of man. They change things that God intended to be permanent. They do things for which they have no Bible authority. Right wing extremists ignore the law of inclusion while left wing extremists ignore the law of exclusion. Both fail to demonstrate a proper respect for the unique authority of the word of God.

Conservatism in matters of opinion and liberalism in matters of faith have seriously hindered the growth of the churches of Christ. This has been especially true in matters of church organization and leadership. Right wing extremists are holding to customs and traditions as though they were laws of God. They refuse to change their methods even though their methods no longer work. Left wing extremists are changing—but they are not only changing in matters of opinion, they are also changing in matters of faith. Right wing extremists have evolved a style of leadership that is neither practical nor Scriptural. It is a leadership style in which the elders lord it over the church. That style needs to be changed. Left wing extremists, however, are changing the structure of church organization and that is equally wrong.

The Non-Denominational Pattern

In the New Testament, the word “church” is sometimes

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used to refer to the universal spiritual fellowship of all the saved. At that level, there was only one church. The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). There is only one body (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:20). The church is the household or family of God (I Tim. 3:15; Eph. 3:15) and God has only one family. All Christians are children in the family of God. God has no children outside His family. The church is the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2) and Christ has only one bride. The church that we read about in the New Testament was not an organization that people joined after they were saved. God adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47).

In the New Testament, the word "church" is also used to refer to local congregations of Christians—such as the church in Jerusalem, the church in Rome, or the church in Antioch. The New Testament never uses the word "church" to refer to a denomination. Denominations, by their own definition, are larger than the local church, but smaller than the universal church. Denominational leaders do not generally claim that one has to be a member of their particular denomination or any denomination at all in order to be a member of God's church. Denominations do not exist on the same level as either the local church or the universal church that we read about in the New Testament and they do not claim that they do.

Denominations have evolved many different systems of church organization. Local congregations are organized in a variety of ways and there are many different kinds of denominational structure that exist above the level of these local congregations.

Some denominations have an episcopalian form of organization in which each local congregation is under the oversight of a Bishop and usually several local congregations are under the oversight of one Bishop. Other denominations have a presbyterian form of organization in which local congregations are under the oversight of a group of leaders selected by the congregation. In most of the denominations, the local congregation is under the oversight of a Pastor.

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Many different forms of denominational organization exists above the level of the local congregation. There are usually city-wide, county-wide, district-wide, state-wide, nation-wide, and world-wide organizations. At various levels, these organizations are known as presbyteries, synods, councils, conferences, assemblies, congresses, conventions, etc. Some of the denominations are controlled from the bottom. Members of local congregations elect delegates, either directly or indirectly, to the various levels in the denominational structure above the level of the local congregation. Other denominations are controlled from the top. The central headquarters controls the lower levels in the hierarchy. Some denominations have no formal structure at all above the local congregations. They practice a congregational form of church organization.

If the Bible had not given us a pattern, it would be up to us to use our own judgment in selecting the kind of church organization that seemed best for us. But the Bible has given us a pattern. There were independent local congregations in the New Testament, but there was no world-wide church organization. Jesus Christ was the one and only head of the church. Heaven was the one and only headquarters of the church. There was no earthly head and no earthly headquarters. The Bible does not expressly forbid the establishment of organizations above the level of the local congregations, but it does not have to. Since the Bible specifies the congregational pattern, all other possible methods of church organization are automatically excluded. Our concern, therefore, in this book will be limited to church organization and leadership at the level of the independent local congregations that we read about in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, there were apostles, prophets, and others with miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:11, I Cor. 12:28). But these miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were never intended to be a permanent feature of the church (I Cor. 13:8). No one in the church today is qualified to be an apostle (Acts 1:21-22). No one in the church today has the miraculous gift of prophecy. Our study, therefore, will not focus on the work of apostles or prophets, but on those leadership positions within the local congregations that God intended to be a permanent feature of His church.

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Organization and Leadership in the Local Congregation

There was no clergy-laity distinction in the New Testament church. All Christians are priests of God (I Pet. 2:5,9). There were, however, a number of different offices in the local congregations. Some object to the use of the term "office," but this term simply means a particular kind of work, an assigned role, a specific function, or a position of leadership. Eph. 4:11 speaks of some who were called "evangelists" and others who were called "pastors" or "teacher." Phil. 1:1 mentions some who were called "bishops" and others who were called "deacons."

There are many terms taken from the Bible that are used in the various denominations to refer to a wide variety of different offices. In the New Testament, however, things were much more simple. Each congregation was guided by a group of men who were called by three titles. In the original Greek text of the New Testament, the three titles were *presbuteros*, *episkopos*, and *poimen*. *Presbyter*, *bishop*, and *pastor* are the Latin equivalents. All of these words have come directly into the English language. The Anglo-Saxon equivalents are *elder*, *overseer*, and *shepherd*. In the New Testament, these were not titles for many different offices. There were just three titles for one office.

Paul called for the elders (presbyters) of the church in Ephesus to meet him at Miletus (Acts 20:17). Then in Acts 20:28, he told these elders-presbyters that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (bishops) of the church and he commanded them to feed the church. The Greek word for "feed" is *poimeno*, which is simply the verb form for "shepherd." It is quite evident that the terms elder-presbyter, overseer-bishop, and shepherd-pastor are used in this passage to refer to the same men. I Pet. 5:1-4 was addressed to the elders-presbyters. Peter told these elders-presbyters to "tend the flock of God which is among you." The phrase "tend the flock" translates that same Greek word that means "to shepherd." Notice that Peter called the church "the flock" and notice that he called Jesus the "Chief Shepherd." Peter also told these men to exercise the oversight that the church needed. The word for "oversight" is a form of the word for

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overseer or bishop. Once again, it is quite evident that the terms elder-presbyter, overseer-bishop, and shepherd-pastor were used to refer to the same men.

In most denominations today, the pastors are the preachers or ministers. In the New Testament, however, the titles "preacher," "minister," or "evangelist" were not used to refer to those who were pastors or shepherds. In II Tim. 4:1-5, Paul told Timothy to "preach the word," and he told him to "do the work of an evangelist" and to "fulfill his ministry." Timothy was a preacher-evangelist-minister, but he was not an elder-overseer-shepherd. Timothy was not a presbyter-bishop-pastor. The apostle Paul called himself a "preacher" (I Tim. 2:7), but Paul was not an elder-overseer-shepherd. Paul was not married (I Cor. 9:5) and therefore was not qualified to serve as an elder (I Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 1:4-9). In the New Testament pattern, the teaching and preaching function of those known as evangelists-ministers-preachers was quite different from the leadership role of those known as elders-overseers-shepherds.

Phil. 1:1 mentions some who were known as "deacons." The office of the deacon was not the same as the office of the bishop. The qualifications for deacons are given in I Tim. 3:8-10 and are not the same as the qualifications given for bishops in I Tim. 3:1-7. Phil. 1:1 and I Tim. 3:8-10 are the only places in the New Testament where we read the title "deacon" and in both of these passages, that office is contrasted with the office of bishop. What this suggests is that deacons were leaders of the church who worked under the oversight of the bishops. The seven who administered aid to the widows in Acts 6:1-7 were not called "deacons" in that passage, but the work they did and the relationship they sustained to the apostles who were then leading the Jerusalem congregation seem to suggest a strong parallel to the office that later was identified by the title "deacon."

In the New Testament, we never read of congregations being ruled by preachers or deacons. Furthermore, we never read of a congregation being ruled by just one elder-overseer-shepherd. The eldership always consisted of a plurality of men. The primary leadership role in the New Testament church was that of the elders-overseers-shepherds and there-

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fore that is what we will focus on in this study of church organization and leadership.

Departures from the New Testament Pattern

Those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat the errors of the past. Present concepts of church organization and leadership are often influenced more by history than by Scripture. In order to avoid making the same mistakes over again, we need to review briefly the departures from the New Testament pattern.

Paul warned the elders of the church in Ephesus, "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). The apostasy which the Holy Spirit had predicted (I Tim. 4:1-3; II Tim. 4:3,4) changed the organization, doctrine, practice, and worship of the church. It is in the area of church organization, however, that the apostasy is traced most clearly.

In the New Testament pattern, local congregations were independent. They communicated, they cooperated, and they felt a genuine sense of brotherhood—but they remained independent. Each local congregation was guided by a plurality of bishops. The first departure from this pattern came when one bishop increased his power and became the "presiding bishop" of the congregation. Ephesus is the first congregation where we find a historical record of this departure from the New Testament pattern. After a while, the presiding bishops in the various congregations increased their power to such an extent that they did away with the eldership. At this point in history, one bishop ruled each congregation. Then, a few years later, the bishops of several congregations in an area started forming a level of organization above the local congregations. At this point in history, a plurality of bishops ruled a plurality of congregations. But then, in the "college of Bishops," as these groups were known, some bishops increased their power. Eventually, one bishop emerged as the Metropolitan or Country Bishop. At this point in the apostasy, one bishop ruled a plurality of

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congregations. This was the exact reverse of the New Testament pattern in which a plurality of bishops led a single congregation.

The quest for power did not end with the development of Metropolitan or Country Bishops. For it was at this time that the Metropolitan or Country Bishops of the world started conducting ecumenical or world-wide councils. At this point in history, one group of bishops ruled all the congregations of Christendom. But the quest for power continued. Within the world-wide councils, the bishops of the five major cities of Christendom came to be known as the Patriarchs or the Cardinal Bishops. The bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem then ruled all the congregations of Christendom. But even this was not enough. Within this group of five Patriarchs, the quest for power continued. John the Faster, Cardinal Bishop of Constantinople, was the first to declare himself to be the Pope—the Universal Bishop of the Church. Gregory the Great was the Cardinal Bishop of Rome at that time and he excommunicated John the Faster, claiming that there should never be any one man to rule the entire church. After Gregory the Great died, his successor, Boniface III, claimed to be the Universal Bishop of the Church. Boniface III had the power of the Roman army to back up his claim and thus he became the first real Pope.

These changes did not come about suddenly. They took almost six centuries. Things changed so slowly that most people in the church did not notice what was happening. But what had started out to be the Christianization of the Roman Empire eventually became the Romanization of the church. From the time of Boniface III (603 AD), the government of the church was an exact copy of the government of the Roman Empire. And as these changes in organization were taking place, the church was changing in many other ways. Elements of the Jewish religion of the Old Testament were brought over and became a part of the church. Many pagan traditions and doctrines were brought into the church. The church had departed so far from the New Testament pattern, that it could no longer regard the Bible as the final authority in matters of faith and practice. Anything in the Bible that did not agree with present doctrines and practices in the

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church was interpreted in a highly figurative manner. The traditions of the church, the decrees of the world-wide councils of bishops, and the statements of the Popes became the final authority in place of the Bible.

The Protestant Reformation Movement took a negative approach to Biblical authority. Luther said that we must not do anything that the Bible expressly forbids. This approach corrected some of the errors of Catholicism, but it did not and it could not restore the New Testament church. Protestant denominations have typically set up organizations with control much closer to the people, but they have not tried to restore the kind of organization that we read about in the New Testament church.

The Catholic tradition and most Protestant traditions have stressed an authoritarian leadership style with the central denominational headquarters controlling lower levels of denominational structure. In this approach, there has been a great emphasis on the chain of command in the denomination's hierarchy. Some denominations rebelled against this kind of authoritarian leadership style. In the wake of the American revolution, some denominations developed a tradition of rule by the majority vote of the members.

The Restoration Movement, which began in the very late 1700s and early 1800s, removed all traces of an authoritarian hierarchy above the local congregations. Within the local congregations, however, some continued to practice an authoritarian leadership style. In some places, the bishops lorded it over the church in the manner of denominational bishops. In many other places, the preacher lorded it over the church after the manner of denominational pastors. However, in the "mainstream" of the Restoration Movement, both of these extremes were avoided and the churches of Christ began to grow rapidly.

In the history of the Restoration Movement, the first major departure from the New Testament pattern of church organization came in 1849 when the American Christian Missionary Society was organized with Alexander Campbell as its first president. At first this organization was almost totally rejected by the congregations of the Restoration Movement. The basis for the opposition was that there

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is no Bible authority for any such organization above the level of the independent local congregations. The American Christian Missionary Society received so little support and so much opposition that it almost died.

But then, in the years following the Civil War, another controversy developed over the use of instrumental music in congregational worship. At first, the defenders of instrumental music in congregational worship tried to find Bible authority for the practice. That effort failed. People either had to give up their support of instrumental music in worship assemblies or else give up the belief that we must have Bible authority for what we do. Unfortunately, the majority gave up the belief that we must have Bible authority for what we do. They went back to Luther's negative approach to Bible authority. They taught that we can do anything in the church that we believe to be proper just as long as the Bible does not expressly forbid it.

When these people gave up the belief that we must have Bible authority for what we do, they had no logical argument that they could use to oppose the American Christian Missionary Society. And thus it was that the instrumental music debate, which came several years after the American Christian Missionary Society was established, opened the door for general acceptance of this change in church organization.

J. W. McGarvey, one of the greatest scholars the Restoration Movement ever produced, said that if we give up the belief that we must have Bible authority for what we do, we have abandoned the only ground on which the restoration of the New Testament church can be accomplished. History was to prove McGarvey right. The acceptance of instrumental music in congregational worship and the resultant acceptance of the American Christian Missionary Society were only the beginning. The next step was the rejection of the Restoration Movement in favor of the Ecumenical Movement. Church federation, open membership, liberal theology, and restructure were soon to follow. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the denomination which emerged from this apostasy, is today one of the liberal denominations leading the Ecumenical Movement.

Many of these departures from the New Testament

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pattern were opposed by a more conservative element in the Christian Church. By the 1950s, a separate fellowship had emerged. It is known generally as the Conservative or Independent Christian Church and in many places its local congregations are known as churches of Christ. This group, however, still defends the use of instrumental music in congregational worship assemblies and to justify that practice they still take Luther's negative approach to Bible authority. They still deny that we must have Bible authority for what we do in the church. Within this group, therefore, the door is still open to new departures from the New Testament pattern.

1906 was the first year that the federal government in its census reports recognized the churches of Christ as being separate from the other "heirs" of the Restoration Movement. At the beginning of this century, only a remnant remained true to the restoration principle. We had lost most of our church buildings, most of our preachers, a majority of our members, and most of the Christian colleges which our brethren had helped to establish. And in all honesty we must admit that the loss of the more liberal element in the Restoration Movement had shifted the ideological balance. With the left wing gone, the right wing exercised a disproportionate influence. All sorts of negative factions developed defending their traditions and customs while opposing any change—even in the area of judgment. Factions thus developed in opposition to located preachers, Christian colleges, Bible classes, individual communion cups, and the sponsoring church method of cooperation in the support of such works as children's homes and evangelism.

As I discussed in my book *Why Churches Grow*, between 1945 and 1965, the church of Christ was the fastest growing religious group in America. But in the 15 years since 1965, the growth rate in the church of Christ has declined steadily. One of the biggest reasons for that decline has been in developments concerning church organization and leadership. Congregations that are conservative in matters of opinion have developed an authoritarian style of leadership in which the elders lord it over the church. That style is wrong and it needs to be changed. But in congregations that are liberal in matters of faith, the tendency has been to go to

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an opposite extreme that is equally wrong. Instead of changing the style of church leadership, what these congregations are doing is to change the structure of church organization. Some of these congregations are following the denominational pattern of rule by the majority vote of the members. Most of them, at least in practice, are following the denominational pattern in which the preacher runs the church. Both of these errors need to be corrected.

The churches of Christ need to retain the structure of church organization that we read about in the New Testament, but we also need to restore the open style of leadership that was practiced in the early church. We do not need to have elders, preachers, or anyone else lording it over the church.

In the chapters that follow in this book, we will study the New Testament pattern of church organization and leadership. We will seek to avoid the extremes of liberalism in matters of faith and conservatism in matters of opinion. Our primary focus will be on the Biblical pattern concerning matters of faith. However, we will also consider the results of scientific research in the study of group dynamics in order to help us improve in those things that are matters of opinion.

Chapter

2

THE ERROR OF AN AUTHORITARIAN LEADERSHIP STYLE

The churches of Christ are not growing today the way we were just a few years ago. Our net growth rate has decreased steadily over the past 15 years—primarily because of a significant increase in our drop-out rate. The most recent survey results indicate that 35 percent of our local congregations have started to decline in membership, 40 percent have stopped growing and are just holding their own, only 25 percent are growing—and they are not growing as fast now as they were just a few years ago. If the present trend continues, growth will totally stop early in the 1980s. At the present rate, our membership by the end of this century will be only half what it is today. Unless this declining growth trend is reversed, the church of Christ will cease to exist on the earth in just 50 years.

It should be evident that there is a bottleneck somewhere. Every bottleneck that I have ever seen was right at the top of the bottle. That is the way it is with the church. The greatest bottleneck hindering growth in the churches of Christ is in the eldership. The error of an authoritarian leadership style in the eldership is the greatest single problem that must be overcome to get the churches of Christ growing once again the way we can and should be growing. In this chapter, we will describe the authoritarian leadership style, demonstrate that this leadership style is contrary to the Scriptures, and discuss the factors which have contributed to the development of this style of leadership.

Description of the Authoritarian Leadership Style

Elderships which practice an authoritarian style of leadership tend to function only as a decision-making body. The

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three titles for this office in the New Testament suggest three different functions. The tendency in elderships which practice an authoritarian style of leadership is to neglect two of these functions and limit their activity to the decision-making role.

The Greek word *presbuteros*, the Latin word *presbyter*, and the Anglo-Saxon word *elder* all literally mean "one who is older." There was, however, a secondary meaning based on the custom of having the older men of a village function as the decision-makers for the village. The village elders typically assembled at the gate of the village (Deut. 25:7; Lev. 5:14; Prov. 31:23). This is what Psa. 107:32 called "the assembly of the elders." We thus read of the elders of Succoth (Judg. 8:14), Bethlehem (I Sam. 16:4), Jezreel (I Kings 21:11; II Kings 10:1), Samaria (II Kings 6:32), and Zion (Lam. 2:10). We also read of the elders of the tribes (Deut. 31:28), the elders of Judah (I Sam. 30:26; Ezek. 8:1), the elders of Israel (II Kings 19:2), and the elders of the land (I Kings 20:8). The elders of the Jews, along with the Chief Priest, made the decisions involved in the persecution and crucifixion of Christ (Mat. 26:59; 27:20, 41; Mk. 15:1) and in the persecution of the early church (Acts 4:23). This secondary meaning of the word "elder" referred to a decision-making, policy-making, executive function. It is obvious that this secondary meaning is the way the word "elder" was used in the New Testament church. Men are not made older by selection and appointment, but men were made elders in the New Testament church by selection and appointment (Acts 14:23). The term "elder," therefore, was used in the New Testament church to refer to a decision-making, policy-making, executive role in the local congregation. But we must remember that this was only one of three titles for this office.

The Greek word *episkopos*, the Latin word *bishop*, and the Anglo-Saxon word *overseer* all refer to an administrative function. An administrator is not just a decision-maker. An administrator is a person who supervises the work of those who are exercising delegated decision-making authority. A personal illustration may help clarify this point. I have an administrative position in the faculty at the University of Tulsa as the Chairman of the Speech/Interpersonal Communi-

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cation Program. It is my responsibility to determine the aims, goals, and objectives for this academic unit. I have a major role in developing new courses and in determining what should be covered in each course. It is my job to determine what courses will be taught, when they will be scheduled, and who will teach each course. In the typical academic year, there are around eight teachers working under my direction. Sometimes I select the text books to be used in these courses, but generally that decision is left up to the individual instructors. It is my responsibility to supervise these instructors so as to be sure that the goals are being met in each class, but it is up to these individual instructors to determine how they will conduct their classes. The day-to-day decision-making has been delegated to the individual instructors. My work as an administrator is to supervise the work that is done by those who have been given delegated decision-making authority.

Perhaps another personal illustration will help to clarify this matter. In recent years, I have been working as a professional consultant in the area of organizational communication. One of the problems that I often encounter in this consulting work is the administrator who refuses to delegate decision-making authority to the people working under his or her direction. When that happens, the administrator is no longer really an administrator. That administrator ends up having to do all the day-to-day decision-making that should be tended to by others.

The use of the term "overseer" in the New Testament church suggests an administrative leadership role. The overseers of local congregations need to determine the aims, goals, and objectives to be achieved in specific programs of work. They need to determine the general policy guidelines within which people will work. Then they need to turn over the day-to-day decision-making to deacons, ministers, and others working under their oversight.

This administrative role is generally neglected in congregations where the elders practice an authoritarian style of leadership. Such elderships typically refuse to delegate any real decision-making authority. As a result, the elders end up having to make all the day-to-day decisions and they do not really have any administrative or supervisory function. In

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many small congregations, there is so little delegation of decision-making authority that there is not much administrative work to do and what little there is ends up being done by the preacher. In many large congregations, preachers or other full-time workers on the staff should be used more in the day-to-day administrative work—but only if the bishops are actively involved in supervising the over-all program of church work.

The Greek word *poimen*, the Latin word *pastor*, and the Anglo-Saxon word *shepherd* all literally mean “one who tends a flock of sheep.” This is another title where the primary meaning of the word was not the way the word was used in the New Testament church. Throughout the Bible, however, the term “shepherd” was used to refer to spiritual teachers, counselors, and leaders. In Bible times, a shepherd lived with his flock, guided them, protected them, defended them, and cared for them. The kind of care that a shepherd had for his flock thus became a symbol for the kind of care that spiritual teachers, counselors, and leaders should have for the people. This is probably the most general of the three Bible titles for this office. To some extent, it includes the decision-making function and the administrative function. What is different about this title is that it emphasizes the quality of the relationship between leaders and followers. The specific functions implied by this title that are not suggested by the two other titles are the functions of teaching and counseling.

It is unfortunate that the Greek word *poimeno* was translated by the word “feed” in our English version of the New Testament. Literally the word *poimeno* is simply the verb form of “shepherd.” Shepherds in Bible-times were quite different from shepherds in the English-speaking world in the days when the Bible was first translated into English. The shepherds of the English-speaking world kept their flocks fenced in. They did not live with their flocks. They sent people to feed the flocks regularly and then came around each year to shear the sheep for their wool and slaughter some for market. Perhaps this is what has given some the idea that the duty of shepherds in the Lord’s church is simply to arrange for someone to preach and to take charge of the money that is contributed. We must remember

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that it was the shepherds of Bible-times and not the shepherds of the English-speaking world that gave the term "shepherd" its meaning in the New Testament church. This title primarily refers to the role of the spiritual teacher and counselor.

In most congregations, the work of shepherding the flock has been turned over almost entirely to the preacher. Jas. 5:14 says "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church." Those elders were to pray for the sick (Jas. 5:15). They were to counsel those who had sinned (Jas. 5:15-16). The command to "confess your sins one to another and pray one for another" (Jas. 5:16) is generally applied to public confession, but it was written in connection with the counseling, teaching, and praying done by the elders of the church. Today, however, most congregations would re-write Jas. 5:14 so that it would read "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the preacher." And the work of counseling, teaching, and praying with those who have sinned is also assigned almost totally to preachers in the church today.

In the New Testament, there were three titles for this office: elder, overseer, and shepherd. But in the churches of Christ today only one of these titles is used to any great extent. Perhaps 99 percent of the time we call these men "elders." We do not call them "overseers" or "shepherds." And about 99 percent of the time when we pray for these men we say "Lord bless our elders and help them make wise decisions." About all that most congregations see in this office any more is the decision-making function. That is also about all that many elders see in this office. Many elderships function only as a decision-making, policy-making "board of director" for the congregation. They do not function as administrators because they do not delegate enough decision-making authority to give them anything to administer. They do not function as spiritual counselors and teachers because they have given that job to the preacher.

In the New Testament pattern, the decision-making was done by those men who were in closest touch with the overall program of work in the congregation because of their work as overseers. The decision-making was done by those men who were in closest touch with the spiritual needs of the

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individual members because of their work as shepherds. But in most churches of Christ today the decision-making is done by a group of men who do not really function as either overseers or as shepherds.

But the limitation of the eldership to a decision-making role is only one of the characteristics of congregations where the eldership practices an authoritarian style of leadership. Another important characteristic has to do with the way that these elderships lord it over the church in their decision-making.

The English word "lord" comes from an Anglo-Saxon word that literally means "one who guards the bread" (no pun intended). A lord was a person who had the authority to rule and that authority came by right of birth or by appointment of a king. The authority of a lord to rule was totally independent of the consent of the people over whom he ruled. In the original Greek text of the New Testament the word for lord is *kurios* and that word had a similar meaning. It referred to one having power or authority. Jesus assumed this title for Himself (Mat. 7:21-22; 9:38; 22:41; Mk. 5:19). The authority of Jesus to rule is totally independent of the consent of any human being. The authority of Jesus as Lord is based on who He is and what He is. In Lk. 6:46, Jesus asked the people why they called Him "Lord" and yet refused to obey His commandments. A lord has the authority to command and his authority is totally independent of the consent of the people over whom he rules.

Elderships which practice an authoritarian style of leadership function as though they had the authority of lords. They make their decisions in total isolation from the congregation. They do not let the members of the congregation know what things are being considered. They do not ask for any input from the members in the decision-making process. They do not create channels of communication to keep the members informed about things being considered. They do not create channels of communication so that the views of the members can be heard before the eldership reaches its decision. And once the decision has been made, these elderships simply announce the decisions as orders which the members are expected to obey without question.

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These elderships place great stress on the authority of their office and on the chain of command in the congregation's organizational structure. They do not involve the members of the congregation at the input stage of the decision-making process, and yet they expect total submission, obedience, and cooperation once the decision has been made.

Such elderships function as a self-perpetuating board of directors for the congregation. The members of the congregation do not have the right to determine that additional elders or deacons are needed. The members of the congregation do not have the right to nominate men to serve as elders or deacons. These elderships decide when men will be added to the eldership or the deaconate. These elderships decide who will be nominated. Typically the congregation is given only the opportunity to present Scriptural objections in the event that someone nominated by the eldership is not Scripturally qualified. And if objections are raised, it is the eldership that decides whether or not to sustain the objection.

These elderships assume that they were appointed for life and they never go back to the congregation to see if they still have the consent of the congregation to serve as elders. Many congregations today have a very high turn-over rate. In many congregations, at least 90 percent of the members were not members of that congregation just ten years ago. And yet in many of these congregations there are elders who were selected at least ten years ago. That means that at least 90 percent of the present members of the congregation had no voice in the selection of the men who now serve as that congregation's elders. But these elders see no need for going back to the congregation from time to time to see if they still have the consent of the congregation to serve as elders. They assume that the authority of their office comes by a direct delegation of authority from God and they accept the doctrine that "once an elder always an elder" (at least as long as an elder remains in a given congregation).

Condemnation of an Authoritarian Leadership Style

In Mat. 20:20-24, the apostles were arguing about posi-

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tions of authority in the church. Jesus called the apostles unto Him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would become great among you shall be your servant and whoever would be first among you shall be your slave—even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mat. 20:25-28). The Romans, who ruled the world when Jesus spoke these words, placed great stress on authority and a chain of command. Their rulers ruled without the consent of the governed. Their rulers lorded it over the people. Jesus said that leadership in His church was not to be like that. He said, "It shall not be so among you."

In I Pet. 5:1-4, Peter said "The elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight thereof not by constraint but willingly—according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples of the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, you shall receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." Peter said that elders were not to lord it over the church.

Based on what we have already learned about the meaning of the word "lord," it is evident that anyone who attempts to serve as an elder without the consent of the congregation is lording it over the church. Those who continue to serve as elders for a long time without being sure that they still have the consent of the congregation to continue serving in this office may be lording it over the church. They have no way of knowing for sure. But those who practice the kind of authoritarian leadership style described earlier can be sure that they are lording it over the church, because they are acting like bosses or dictators and not like servants or slaves. This is not to suggest that an eldership should be a "rubber stamp" for whatever the majority of the congregation wants to do. But it is to suggest that the congregation needs to be brought into the decision-making process. There must be effective two-way communi-

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cation. The congregation must be kept informed about all major items being considered and the views of the members must be carefully considered by the eldership. Without that kind of two-way communication, the eldership cannot lead in the manner commanded by Mat. 20:25-28 and I Pet. 5:1-4. Without effective two-way communication, the eldership will be isolated from the congregation and their leadership will be that of lords and not servants.

There is no way that an eldership can please every member of a congregation, but the members must at least know that their voices are heard. They must be assured that their ideas, suggestions, comments, and even their criticism will be seriously considered by the eldership. One of the most important findings in the scientific study of group dynamics is that *the more people you can get involved in the formulation of a policy the more people you will have committed to the execution of that policy*. An eldership should encourage all the diversity of opinion that is possible at the input stage of the decision-making process. Once the eldership has considered all views and made the best decision that those elders can make, then the congregation needs all the unity that is possible. But you are not likely to get the unity you want once the decision has been made unless the members have had some meaningful input in the decision-making process.

One thing that has confused some people about the authoritarian style of leadership is that Acts 20:28 says that the Holy Spirit makes men bishops. Some have assumed from this that there is a direct delegation of divine authority from the Holy Spirit to the bishops. This has led some to believe that these overseers do not need the consent of the congregation or communication with the congregation. Such an assumption is not warranted. Elders do not receive a direct delegation of divine authority when they are ordained. The delegation of authority is indirect. A congregation that does not yet have elders has all the authority it needs to do everything that God ever told His church to do. No new authority is created when a congregation selects elders. What happens, therefore, is that the authority of the congregation as a whole is delegated to those men the congregation selects to serve as elders. The delegation of

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authority is from the Holy Spirit to the congregation and then from the congregation to the elders.

It is absolutely essential that we understand two important principles concerning the nature of delegation. First, you cannot delegate accountability; all you can delegate is decision-making authority. Second, any authority that is delegated can be withdrawn by those who delegated it in the first place. Suppose that an eldership delegates some authority to a deacon to administer a program of personal evangelism in a congregation. Suppose that this deacon does not do what he was supposed to do. Those elders cannot stand before God in judgment and say, "Don't blame us. He's the one to blame." Obviously that will not do. Those elders are still accountable. If that deacon was not getting the job done, those elders should have helped him, corrected him, motivated him—or taken back from him their delegation of authority. That is easy to see in the illustration of an eldership delegating authority to a deacon. But the same principle applies when a congregation delegates its collective authority to an eldership. Members of the congregation cannot stand before God in judgment and say, "Don't blame us for failing to reach the lost. We delegated our authority to the elders and they didn't get the job done. They are the ones to blame." That will not do either. If elders are not doing the work God intended them to do, the congregation that put them in the eldership should remove them from the eldership. Any time a majority of the members of a congregation no longer consent for a man to serve as one of their elders *he is no longer an elder!* Elders cannot serve without the consent of the congregation. To do so is to Lord it over the church and therefore a clear violation of Mat. 20:25-28 and I Pet. 5:1-4.

Heb. 13:17 is a favorite proof-text for those who defend the authoritarian style of church leadership: "Obey those who have the rule over you and submit to them for they watch in behalf of your souls." *Peitheste* is the Greek word in the original text that is here translated "obey." This word does imply that elders have authority. However, this word literally means "submit to the persuasion of" those who are your leaders. There is a big difference between leaders who persuade and leaders who simply give orders and expect the

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members to obey without question. I Tim. 3:2 says that elders must be capable teachers. As a practical matter we must remember that the church is a voluntary association in which people do what they are taught to do and what they are persuaded to do. As a practical matter, simply ordering the members to obey does not work. As a spiritual matter, it is not right. To do so is to lord it over the church.

Elders need effective two-way communication in order to get the members involved at the input stage of the decision-making process. Once the elders have carefully considered all views, they need to make the best decision that they can. Once that decision has been made, the elders need to lead the congregation by their persuasion, their teaching, and their example and not just give orders. To do otherwise is to lord it over the church.

Causes of Authoritarian Leadership Style

One of the first steps in solving any problem is to identify the causes of the problem situation. We will not likely correct the problems associated with an authoritarian leadership style in the eldership unless we can first identify the factors that caused us to develop such a leadership style in the first place. Many who have written on this subject have implied that the cause of these problems is a lust for power on the part of men who serve as elders. I do not believe that such a judgment is at all accurate. I have been a member of a good many congregations; I have preached for many others; and I have served as an elder. I have had the opportunity to observe a large number of elderships. And I am persuaded that a lust for power is very rare among elders. I have found it to be far more common among preachers—although I believe that it is rare among preachers. Focusing on a lust for power, in my opinion, is a serious mistake since such a focus misses the real problems.

A lack of effective two-way communication seems to me to be the primary cause of this problem. There was a time when most of our congregations were much smaller than they are now. Back then it was relatively easy for elders to keep in close touch with the members. No special effort was needed to create effective channels of communication to and from

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the members. Informal communication was enough to get the job done. However, as our congregations grew, these old information channels of communication were no longer enough to keep the eldership in close touch with the congregation. Not knowing how to create effective two-way channels of communication, elderships became more and more isolated. As they did, it was inevitable that their leadership style should become more and more authoritarian.

Gradually, this authoritarian leadership style became the accepted way of doing things. It became our custom, our tradition. After that, we went to the Bible to find ways of justifying our tradition and we missed the important Bible lessons about the error of lording it over the church. We ignored the important lessons about the nature of delegation. Furthermore, the members who did not really want to get all that involved found the authoritarian leadership style to be just what they wanted. They could remain uninvolved and place all the blame for the failures in their congregation on the eldership.

There is one final cause of this problem situation that we need to consider. The Scottish poet Robert Burns put it this way: "Oh would some power the good Lord give us to see ourselves as others see us." Many elders who have no lust for power and no intention of ever lording it over the church would be greatly shocked if they could see themselves as the members of their congregation see them. Actually these elders are willing and even anxious to listen to the suggestions, comments, ideas, and even the criticism the members have to offer. But the members do not know this. Many elderships have tried having "Business Meetings" so that they could get more input from the congregation and yet the members have not even attended these meetings. Some elderships have told the congregation that they want the congregation's input, but for some reason the congregation has not taken them seriously.

One of the problems is that elders generally know what is going on. They know what things are being considered. They may even tell the members about the things they are considering. Since they have told them, they assume that the members know what is going on. The trouble is that telling is not the same thing as communicating. Communication is

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the process of creating an acceptable degree of shared meaning between people. Just telling people is not usually enough. Many elderships have incorrectly assumed that communication is easy. It is not. It is one of the most difficult things in all the world. There are many points in the communication process where communication can break down. Communication is my specialty—the area in which I do most of my teaching, research, and writing. And I can assure you that the more I have studied communication the more I am amazed that it ever happens.

Most elders go into the eldership without the kind of communication that would let them really know that they have the consent of the congregation to serve as elders. Since most elderships function as a self-perpetuating board of directors, about all a new elder knows is that he has the consent of the present elders to join them in the eldership. Generally he also knows that no one in the congregation was able to present a Scriptural objection to his appointment which the present eldership would sustain. However, he does not know how many members of the congregation really want him to serve as an elder. Once he has been in the eldership for several years, there has generally been such a turn-over in the membership of the congregation that most of the people he now must lead had no voice at all in his selection. Furthermore, since most elderships do not have effective channels for two-way communication with the congregation, most elderships must make their decisions with very little information about how the members feel concerning the matters being considered. Since most elderships do not delegate enough decision-making authority to their deacons and thus end up having to do the day-to-day decision-making that deacons should have done, the elders do not have a real administrative role and they do not have time for shepherding. They are often so busy with the day-to-day decision-making that they cannot see the forest for the trees. They do not really have the kind of perspective on the over-all program of work that they need. And since they do not have time to function as shepherds, they do not have the insight they need concerning the spiritual needs of the individual members. It is no wonder, then, that when these elders announce their decisions to the congregation, it seems

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to the members that they are functioning as bosses, dictators, or an isolated board of directors.

What is needed in order to correct the problems associated with an authoritarian style of church leadership is an open style of leadership that stresses effective two-way communication. That is the subject we will consider in Chapter Four. But before we get to that subject, we first need to consider some inappropriate responses that some are making to the need for a change in the style of church leadership. The authoritarian style of church leadership is wrong. It is not Scriptural. It is not practical. It does not work. But in their efforts to flee from Rome, some are going all the way past Jerusalem and ending up in Babylon. Some are going to an opposite extreme that is equally wrong. Instead of changing the style of church leadership, what they are doing is to change the structure of church organization. That is what we will consider in Chapter Three.

Chapter

3

THE ERROR OF CHANGING THE STRUCTURE OF CHURCH ORGANIZATION

When people try to solve problems they often make matters even worse. Governments have frequently demonstrated this tendency. People in general seem to have a tendency to go from one extreme to another. Thus they often exchange one set of problems for another set of problems that are even more serious. This tendency is clearly evident in the study of church organization and leadership.

In this chapter, we will consider some inappropriate responses that various people have made in an effort to correct the problems discussed in the previous chapter—the problems associated with an authoritarian style of leadership. In many of our congregations, there is a need for a change in the style of leadership. But the inappropriate responses that we will study in this chapter have not really changed the style of leadership. Instead, they have changed the structure of church organization. In some congregations there has been a significant movement away from the New Testament pattern of church organization. At the level of doctrine, there has been a significant movement in the direction of a denominational pattern of majority rule. In practice, however, the movement has been in the direction of a denomination pattern in which the preacher runs the church.

A Movement Away From the Bible Pattern, of Church Organization

Three thousand years ago, Solomon said, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9). The false doctrines we will examine in this chapter sound like new ideas to those who have not studied the history of the Restoration Move-

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ment, but most of them have been around for a long time. In 1870, J. W. McGarvey published a book called *A Treatise on the Eldership*. McGarvey was the editor of a religious journal called the *Apostolic Times*. His book on the eldership consisted of a series of editorial articles originally published in this journal. McGarvey is generally regarded as one of the greatest scholars the Restoration Movement ever produced. Serious students of church organization would do well to go back and study this classic by McGarvey. Doing so, they would find that many of the false doctrines that appear to be new ideas were causing trouble in the church over 100 years ago.

There are those who claim that the term *elder* was used in the New Testament to describe a work and not an office. On this point, McGarvey correctly observes, "We regard the distinction as one between words rather than ideas; for one of a body of men, who has any *work* specially assigned to him by the body, is an officer of that body, in the full import of the term."

There are some who argue that the term *elder* was always used in the New Testament to mean *older persons*. There are some passages where this was obviously the intended meaning (I Tim. 5:1, I Pet. 5:5). The contrast in these verses is clearly between those who are older and those who are younger. As McGarvey points out, however, there are other passages of Scripture in which the word *elder* is not used in this way. Acts 14:23 says that Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every church on Paul's first missionary journey. McGarvey explains, "The term here rendered *ordained* is *cheirotoneo*. It is compounded of *cheir*, the *hand*, and *teino*, to *stretch forth*, and its primary meaning is to *stretch forth the hand*. But from the fact that bodies of men frequently expressed a choice by an elevation of the hand, it acquired the meaning of to *choose* or to *appoint* by an extension of the hand; and finally it came to mean to appoint without reference to the method of appointing." The only other use of *cheirotoneo* in the New Testament is in II Cor. 8:19, where we read of an unnamed brother "who' was appointed by the churches" to assist Paul in collecting an offering for the poor of Judea. Paul told Titus, "For this cause I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking and

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appoint elders in every city.” The word here rendered *appoint* is *kathisteemi*, the Greek word most commonly used both in the New Testament and in the Greek version of the Old Testament for appointing to office (Mat. 24:45; Acts 7:10,27; Heb. 5:1; 8:3; Gen. 12:33-34; Lev. 12:14; II Sam. 6:21). Some men were made elders by appointment in the New Testament church, but people are not made older by appointment. One writer recently tried to get around the obvious implication of Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5 by suggesting that it was simply older men who were appointed. But these verses do not say that older men were appointed to be something else. These verses say that certain men were appointed to be elders. This clearly shows that the term *elder* was not always used simply to men *older persons*, but was the title of an office in the New Testament church.

Even if the term *elder* always meant *older persons*, that would not explain the terms *overseer* and *shepherd*—both of which were clearly used in reference to an office of leadership. We have already seen from I Pet. 5:1-4 and Acts 20:17,28, that the men called *overseers* and *shepherds* were also called *elders*. One cannot logically escape the conclusion that there was an office of leadership in the New Testament church called by the titles *elders*, *overseer*, and *shepherd*.

Some people today are claiming that there should be elders, but that there should be no *eldership* in congregations. This argument is based on the fact that the word *eldership* is not found in the common English versions of the New Testament. However, the Greek word *presbuterion* is found three times in the New Testament, twice in reference to the Jewish Sanhedrin (Lk. 22:66; Acts 22:5) and once in reference to the eldership in the church (I Tim. 4:14). In this passage where the reference is to the church, our English versions commonly use the word *presbytery*, but as McGarvey points out, that is just the Greek word anglicised and it is the exact equivalent of *eldership*. Since the Greek word *presbuteros* is uniformly translated *elder*, the only translation of *presbuterion* that fits is *eldership*.

Some who urge that there should be elders but no eldership go on to explain the significance of that distinction. They claim that elders should be examples, role-

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models, and father-figures, but that they should not function as a decision-making body. It is true, of course, that elders should lead by their example (I Pet. 5:3). But the Bible does not teach that they lead *only* by their example. We have already seen that the Greek word *presbuteros* (elder) was not used simply to mean *older persons*, but was used in reference to members of a decision-making body.

But some are arguing that elders have placed themselves at the peak of a non-existent pyramid and that in the New Testament church, no one was over anyone else. It is true, of course, that elders should be servants and not lords. However, it is not correct to say that no one was over anyone else in the New Testament church. Heb. 13:7 says "Remember those who had the rule over you, men who spoke unto you the word of God." Heb. 13:17 says "Obey those who have the rule over you and submit to them for they watch in behalf of your souls." I Thess. 5:12-13 says "But we beseech you, brethren, to know those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake." Remember that elders were called *overseers* (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7). These elders had the authority to rule (I Tim. 5:17), "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of a double honor, especially those who labor in the word and teaching." The word for rule in the original Greek text of I Tim. 5:17 is *proistemi*, which literally means "to stand before." But this word did not mean to stand before in the sense of leading by example. The meaning was to stand before in the sense of presiding over. The meaning was to be over or to superintend. In the Greek text, the word for rule in Heb. 13:17 ("Obey those who have the rule over you") is *hegeomai*, which means to lead, to govern, or to preside over. And the word for submit in this passage ("Obey those who have the rule over you and submit to them for they watch in behalf of your souls") is *hupeiko*. This was a military term which meant to arrange yourself in rank below those who have the authority to rule over you and thus to submit to their leadership. These passages make it clear that the pyramid of authority did exist in the New Testament church. In terms of the style of leadership, that pyramid was not stressed—but it did exist. Elders in the New Testament church did have the authority

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to function as a decision-making body in local congregations.

Today we are being told in some circles that elders never have the right to make a decision which is contrary to the will of the majority in the congregation. Specifically, we are being told that elders do not have the right to fire a preacher if a majority of the members want to keep that preacher. But Titus 1:9-11 tells us that elders must know God's word and be able to teach God's word because there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers "whose mouths must be stopped." If a preacher is teaching false doctrine and refuses to be corrected, elders have not only the right but also the responsibility to fire him. There may be situations in which a preacher has deceived a majority in the congregation or in which the congregation is not aware of what the preacher is doing. In such situations, a preacher might be able to get a vote of confidence from a majority of the members. The elders, however, are the ones charged with the responsibility for making the final decision in such matters.

In terms of leadership style, the Bible does not place the emphasis on the authority of the elders. However, in terms of the structure of church organization and the decision-making process in the congregation, the Bible clearly teaches that elders have the authority and the duty to function as a decision-making body for the congregation. To teach otherwise is to move away from the New Testament pattern.

A Movement Toward a Denominational Pattern of Majority Rule

There are some who claim that we never read in the New Testament of elders making any decisions at all. Instead, they claim that decisions were made by the entire congregation. Those who make this claim typically point to Acts 15:22 as proof. They point out that the congregation in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to the congregation in Jerusalem to discuss the question about what to do with the Gentile converts (Acts 15:2-4) and the decision was not only approved by the apostles and elders, but by the whole church (Acts 15:22). However, Acts 15:2 says that Paul and Barnabas were sent "unto the apostles and elders about this

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question.” The whole church was present at this meeting (Acts 15:4), but the multitude kept silence (Acts 15:12) and the solution was proposed by one of the elders (Acts 15:19). Acts 15:22 does not say that the apostles and elders got the approval of the whole church before making the final decision. It simply says that the decision made by the apostles and elders seemed good to the whole church.

Acts 6:1-6 is also used as a proof-text by those who advocate a majority-rule approach to decision-making in the church. Acts 6:5 says that what the apostles said “pleased the whole multitude,” but it does not say that the decision was made by majority vote. Notice that the Jerusalem congregation did not yet have elders at that time and the apostles were then leading the congregation. The apostles were the ones who called the church together (Acts 6:2). It was the apostles who said what was to be done (Acts 6:3,4). The congregation selected seven men who met the qualifications set down by the apostles (Acts 6:5). Then it was the apostles who appointed these men to serve (Acts 6:3,6).

Acts 6:1-6 and Acts 15:4-29 are good examples of the kind of communication that is needed for an open style of leadership. These passages are also good examples of members obeying those who had the rule over them and submitting to their persuasion. However, these passages do not teach that decisions were made by the majority vote of the congregation in the New Testament church. It may be true that we never read in the New Testament of elders making any decisions, but we never read of a congregation making decisions by majority-vote either.

In this country, we believe in the principle of majority-rule, but the church is not the same thing as a nation. The church that we read about in the New Testament was not a democracy. It was a monarchy, a kingdom. As our king, Jesus Christ has all authority. He has delegated certain decision-making authority in matters of expedience to local congregations. When those local congregations select and appoint elders, the decision-making authority of the congregation as a whole is transferred to the eldership. Elders need to make sure that there is effective two-way communication before and after decisions are made. But elders must also recognize that they have the authority, the right, the

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responsibility, and the duty to function as a decision-making body for the congregation. The system which many denominations use of making decisions by the majority vote of the congregation is not Scriptural.

A Movement Toward A Denominational Pattern of Rule by the Preacher

The direction many congregations are taking in terms of doctrine is a movement toward a denominational pattern of majority rule, but in practice the movement is really toward a denominational pattern of rule by the preacher. Look at what happens in the large public meetings where decisions are made by majority vote. A preacher gets up in front of the congregation and says, "We need a new church secretary and Sister Jones has offered to take the job for \$5 per hour. All those in favor of hiring Sister Jones say Amen, Amen." That approach gives a great appearance of openness. It looks like the congregation is making decisions by majority vote. But large public meetings like that are easy to manipulate. The most skillful speaker in the congregation can easily railroad that kind of meeting. People who may not agree are greatly inhibited from speaking out in a large public meeting like that. Doing business in that way effectively stifles any expression of dissent. A preacher who knows much about audience psychology can easily control that kind of meeting and be sure of getting his way. It is much harder to control a small private meeting of elders who have kept in close touch with the congregation. When preachers are allowed to conduct church decision-making in large public meetings like that, it only appears that decisions are being made by majority vote. What is actually happening is that the preacher has that congregation firmly under his thumb. What has happened is that the lordship of the elders has been replaced by the lordship of the preacher. Both are wrong.

Those who favor one-man rule by the preacher sometimes claim that whenever God had any great work to do, He never formed a committee—He always raised up one man to do the job. Some have been frustrated by the slow pace of decision-

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making in the eldership. Some have claimed that a camel is a horse that was put together by committee—and a duck-billed platypus is a bird put together by an eldership. It is true that the decision-making process involving an eldership is much slower than one-man rule. But God seemed to be more concerned about the quality of the decisions than He was about the speed of the decisions. Decisions reached by a group of qualified elders after thorough communication with the congregation and careful deliberation within the eldership are likely to be much better than decisions made through any system of one-man rule. At any rate, this is not a subject that is open to debate among those who accept the Bible as the final authority of God in the church. God's plan calls for the eldership to function as the decision-making body for the congregation. It is not Scriptural for the preacher to run the congregation.

This movement toward a denominational pattern of rule by the preacher seems to be most predominant among those who believe that the congregation must be built around the personality of the preacher. Some congregations are being developed in that manner today. Some of those congregations would not survive if the preacher ever moved or died. But any congregation that could not survive without any one preacher does not deserve to survive because it is no longer the church of Christ, but has become the church of the preacher.

Some preachers have been willing to admit that the eldership has a decision-making role in regard to certain aspects of the congregation's work, but they claim that the work they do as preachers is independent of the oversight of the elders. These preachers typically claim that while the preacher in his role as a member of the congregation is under the authority of the elders just as are all the other members—the preacher in his role as a preacher is not under the authority of the elders. This same line of reasoning would suggest that a deacon in his role as a deacon, a teacher in his role as a teacher, or a janitor in his role as a janitor is not under the oversight of the elders.

It is true, of course, that a preacher's authority to preach comes from God and not from the elders. Elders have no

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right to tell a preacher what he can and cannot preach. However, elders have both the right and the responsibility to determine what will or will not be preached in the congregation where they serve as elders. If a preacher does not agree with the eldership about what should or should not be preached, then the preacher should do his preaching elsewhere. If the elders will not allow a preacher to preach the truth, then they are wrong and the congregation that put them into the eldership should take them out of the eldership.

Conclusion

Approximately 75 percent of our congregations have stopped growing. The biggest bottleneck hindering growth in these congregations is the authoritarian leadership style practiced by their elders. If this declining growth trend is not corrected, growth in the churches of Christ will totally stop early in the 1980s, membership at the turn of the century will be only half what it is now, and 50 years from now the church of Christ will cease to exist on this earth. But we need to remember that Satan was not able to stop the rapid growth of the early church through a strategy of decreasing membership. Instead, his strategy was to turn the church of Christ into something that was not the church of Christ. In the early days of the Restoration Movement, Satan was not able to stop the rapid growth of the church and so, once again, his strategy was to turn the church of Christ into something that was not the church of Christ. The problems associated with an authoritarian leadership style are the main causes of the declining growth rate in the churches of Christ today. In the long run, however, the greatest danger we face is not the danger of declining membership that will reach zero in 50 years. Rather, it is the danger of a new apostasy that could turn the church of Christ into something that is not the church of Christ in much less than 50 years. One of the greatest dangers of apostasy comes from those who would change the structure of church organization by teaching the doctrine of majority rule while practicing the system in which the preacher runs the congregation.

Chapter

4

AN OPEN STYLE OF LEADERSHIP

Changing the structure of church organization is not the way to correct the problems associated with an authoritarian leadership style. What is needed is an open style of leadership. In order to practice an open style of leadership, elders must have a proper understanding of their three roles: 1) their decision-making, policy-making, or executive roles as elders; 2) their administrative role as overseers; and, 3) their spiritual counseling and teaching role as shepherds. They must also have the proper attitude toward their work. They must realize that the only authority they have is that which the congregation has delegated to them. They must lead as servants, not as lords. They must at all times be sure that they serve with the consent of the congregation. And to make this open style of leadership work, they must communicate. They must find ways to keep the congregation fully informed about all important matters being considered. They must find ways to get the members involved at the input stage of the decision-making process. They must create channels of communication from the members to the eldership. They must demonstrate that they are eager to listen and that they really appreciate the ideas, suggestions, comments, and criticism the members have to offer. As elders, they must assume the responsibility of making those decisions that can only be made at the eldership level. They must not be "rubber stamps" for the majority vote or for the will of the preacher. Once they have made the best decision that they can, they must communicate in order to lead the congregation by their teaching, their persuasion, and their example.

In this chapter we will focus on how an open style of leadership works. As we do, we will consider this subject under the headings of the three leadership roles associated

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with this office: decision-making, administration, and shepherding.

Decision-Making

When God tells us what to do, but does not tell us how to do it, the *what* is a matter of faith and the *how* is a matter of judgment. God has already made the decisions in matters of faith. Our task in such matters is not to decide what we think is best, but simply to decide what God's will is. This is not really "decision-making" in the ordinary sense of the term. It is more a matter of discovery. For example, as we search the Scriptures, we discover that the church is supposed to come together to observe the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). An eldership would not have the right to decide that in their judgment Friday would be a better day of worship. God has already made that decision. That is a matter of faith. But an eldership does have the responsibility for deciding the time on the Lord's Day when they will call the congregation together for worship. That is a decision that God has left up to us. That is a matter of judgment.

Some have claimed that the decision-making authority of elders is limited to matters of judgment. That statement is true in so far as it goes, but it is an over-simplification. There are many false teachers—even within the church. Brethren do not always agree on matters of faith the way they should. There are times when members of the church differ on matters of doctrine. They do not agree on what should be taught. There are times when some members of the church favor certain practices and argue that they are Scriptural while other members of the church oppose the practices as being contrary to the will of God. In such cases, elders must decide what will be taught and practiced in the congregation. But when that happens, the task of the elders is to discover the will of God and not to make a decision based on their own judgment.

In their effort to discover the will of God, elders should keep an open mind. They should be willing to listen to anyone who may be able to help them come to a better understanding of God's word. They should refuse to permit

the teaching of error, even if everyone else in the congregation favors that error. They should refuse to permit any practice that is contrary to the will of God, even if everyone else in the congregation favors that practice. However, they must base their decisions in such matters wholly on the word of God. They should not refrain from doing some good work that is Scriptural just because a few members of the congregation think that it is not Scriptural. They most certainly should not refrain from doing some good work that is Scriptural just because a few people in the congregation object without any Scriptural justification at all.

Elders must discover the will of God and in that sense make some decisions about what is and what is not Scriptural. But when they make such a decision, they should never say that this is what will be taught or done “because this is what the elders have decided.” Instead, they should say that this is what will be taught or done “because this is what the word of God teaches.” They must be able to back up their decisions on such matters with Scriptural proof.

On this point, the translation of Titus 1:9 in the King James Version is most unfortunate: “holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to *convince* the gainsayers.” This translation implies that an eldership could not act until they had persuaded all the objectors and won their agreement. Some congregations work that way. They will not do any good work if any member thinks that the work is contrary to the will of God—regardless of how unsound his reasoning might be. Some congregations refuse to do any good work if any member objects—even without a pretense of Scriptural evidence. Such congregations always have someone ready to put on the brakes and bring good works to a halt. A much more accurate translation of Titus 1:9 is “exhort and *convict* the gainsayers.” The Greek word translated *convince* in the King James Version and *convict* in other versions is *elencho*, which means to refute, reprove, or rebuke. This word does not mean to persuade or to win agreement. Of course, elders should try to persuade those who are in error. But it is not essential that those in error be convinced before the elders act. Those who are in error and who refuse to be persuaded must be convicted. The word of

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God must be used to refute their error and to rebuke them. What is essential is that the judgment of the elders in such a matter be acceptable to God, not to men.

Apart from these areas of doctrinal disagreement, the primary decision-making role of the eldership is in the area of judgment. It is especially in this area that effective communication to the congregation and from the congregation is most essential.

Elders need to consider seriously the teaching of Prov. 11:14, "Where there is no wise guidance, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." In a similar passage, Prov. 15:22 says, "Where there is no counsel, purposes are disappointed; but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." As leaders of the Lord's army, elders need to consider the teaching of Prov. 24:6, "For by wise guidance you shall make your war; and in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."

In order to make the best possible decisions, elders need all the help they can get. They need to hear many different ideas. They need to look at things from many different points of view. They do not need a lot of "yes men." They need all the diversity of opinion that is possible at the input stage of the decision-making process. In order to get the input that they need, elders must first of all communicate in order to keep the congregation informed about the things that are being considered. Then they need to create channels of communication from the members to the elders.

In order to communicate effectively with the congregation, elders need to avoid one of the major reasons for communication breakdown: information overload. When people get too many messages at one time, they cannot pay attention to all of them. Usually they do not pay attention to any of them. One of the most important communication rules is the rule called "K.I.S.S." Some people say that this stands for "Keep It Simple, Stupid." But I prefer the version that says "Keep It Short and Simple." Many elderships have reported things to the congregation in the church bulletin (usually hidden between articles "borrowed" from "Anonymous") and they have repeated the item as one of many announcements crowded in at the beginning or the end of a worship assembly. Then they have been amazed when many

of the members complained that they had never gotten the message. Such elders often say, "But we *told* them!" What they forget is that telling is not the same thing as communicating.

Elders need to keep the members informed about all *major* matters being considered, but if they go to the congregation with every little detail, the problem of information overload will block any effective communication. Elders must know the congregation well enough to know what things the members will want to know about and what things the members would rather have the elders, deacons, and others tend to on their own without any involvement from the membership at large.

Consider the analogy of our government. In this country we have a representative rather than a direct democracy. If all the citizens had to vote on every bill before Congress and approve every executive action and judicial decree, we would spend all our time in the voting booth. Most of the time we would not have enough information to cast an informed ballot. Soon we would be so frustrated that we would not bother to vote at all and the country would end up being run by special interest groups. In our system of government, we have applied an important principle: "Authority dissipated is authority destroyed." We have reserved for ourselves the right to vote on the most important matters—the selection of those who govern. We have delegated the rest.

Elders need to remember this same principle. One of the main reasons that God's pattern of local church government calls for congregations to appoint elders is so that the elders and those working under their direction can make the many decisions that must be made and leave the members more time to be involved in serving God in other ways. However, most of the day-to-day decisions ought to be made by the deacons and others working under the direction of the elders. The kind of congregation-wide decisions that can be made only at the eldership level are usually important enough to call for communication with the congregation.

There are several ways in which this communication can be achieved. The following discussion simply outlines a few possibilities. Elders must find *some* way of communicating with the congregation, but the question of specific methods

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is a matter of judgment and not a matter of faith. It is not essential that a congregation use all or any of the methods outlined below. What is essential is that elders find some way or ways of communicating effectively with the congregation.

Many congregations have had "business meetings" for years, but most have found these to be ineffective channels of communication. The main reason that they are ineffective is that they are so dull most members will not attend. Some congregations have allowed the business meetings to degenerate into a monthly gripe session attended only by a few people who object to everything. Some of these business meetings are so dominated by those who were born in the objective case and the kickative mode that attending them is enough to dampen the fires of enthusiasm in anyone. Most of the low points in my own spiritual life have come as a result of attending such business meetings.

Many congregations started having monthly business meetings back before they appointed elders. Based on the idea that the women and children should be in subjection, they restricted these monthly business meetings to the men of the congregation. That monthly business meeting functioned as the decision-making body for the congregation. After the congregation appointed elders, the monthly business meeting of the men continued—but the function of such a meeting was no longer clear. Some congregations still use the monthly business meeting of the men as a decision-making body, even after they have appointed elders. The very use of the term "business meeting" seems to suggest that this is a meeting in which the business affairs of the congregation will be discussed and decided upon. My own personal opinion is that a congregation that has appointed elders would be much better off if it never had another business meeting. There are, however, other kinds of meetings that could serve as effective channels of communication.

If a congregation has already appointed elders, then it does not need any general decision-making meetings, but it could use some communication meetings. But since the function is communication and not decision-making, I see no reason to restrict such meetings to the men of the

congregation. Some congregations have found that it is effective to have general communication meetings for the entire congregation every few months. Some congregations plan a brief Sunday evening worship assembly every few months and then follow that worship assembly with a general communication meeting for the entire congregation. Such general meetings are an effective one-way channel of communication. That kind of meeting is a good way to keep the congregation informed, but it is not a good way to get much feedback from the members.

A better approach that I have seen some congregations use is to plan about five minutes worth of "Elders' Communication Time" in the Sunday morning worship assembly every week or so. If that time is used wisely so as to avoid the information overload problem, that can be a good way of keeping the congregation informed about matters being considered and decisions that have been made. Having an "Elders' Page" in the church bulletin can be an effective channel of communication to the congregation—if the material is well written and the bulletin is well produced. An approach that avoids the information overload problem is to have special mailings of letters from the elders to the members. In that way it is much easier to focus attention on one specific matter.

Most elderships keep minutes of their meetings. In addition to the detailed minutes that include everything the elders discussed (including some highly confidential matters), some congregations make a summary of the minutes available to all the members. Such a summary usually consists of a record of proposals being considered and decisions that have been made. Most members are not interested in reading something that detailed, but just knowing that it is available helps to create an open atmosphere. Some congregations simply post the summary of the minutes on a bulletin board or keep it in a book that is available in the foyer at the church building.

All of the channels of communication that we have discussed thus far are one-way channels of communication from the elders to the members. That kind of communication is much easier to achieve than the communication from the members to the elders. The flow of messages in an organ-

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ization is like the flow of water. It is easy to get water to flow downward. You have to work to get water to flow upward. Water will create its own channels to flow downward. To get water to flow upward, you have to put in pipes and a pump. In a similar way, elders really have to work in order to create channels of communication from the members to the elders and they have to work hard to get the members to use those channels of communication.

Large public meetings are good channels of communication from the elders to the members, but to get much feedback or involvement from the members you need to break up into smaller groups. Some congregations have replaced their monthly business meetings of the men with monthly communication meetings of the men. They have kept these sessions brief, informative, and positive. They have used these sessions to get the men of the congregation involved in offering suggestions and making comments on matters the elders are considering.

There is no good reason to assume that the men of the congregation have all the wisdom. A few congregations have tried having regular meetings of the elders with the women of the church. Some women are much more likely to speak out and offer their suggestions in such a meeting than they would in a general meeting of the entire congregation. Much of the work of the church is done by women. Often they are in closer touch with some programs of church work than are the men. Sometimes they have better ideas than the men. Furthermore, some women in the church do not have a husband who is a Christian who will "represent them" at the meetings limited to the men of the congregation.

Some elders meet on a regular basis with other small groups within the congregation. A regular meeting with the young people is often a good idea. Regular meetings with such groups as the Bible class teachers, bus workers, people involved in benevolent work, child care work, personal evangelism programs, or other such programs can also be useful.

One of the best approaches is to divide the membership into zones. Some congregations have zones arranged geographically. Others divide the congregation into zones alphabetically. Some congregations use these zones only for

purposes of fellowship and communication. Others use the zones as work units in visitation and benevolent work. Some use the zones for home Bible study and devotionals. A typical pattern is to have a leader or organizer for each zone. These zones are typically divided among the elders so that whenever one of the zone groups meets at least one of the elders will be present. The informal atmosphere of these small group meetings provides an excellent channel of communication. In such meetings, an elder can explain various things the elders are considering and ask for immediate feedback from the members.

Another approach that some congregations have found to be very effective is to schedule elder-member conferences on a regular basis. Some elderships spend every Sunday afternoon in such elder-member conferences. Suppose that there are 300 families represented in a local congregation and eight elders in that congregation. Those eight elders could split up into four two-man teams and conduct four 45-minute meetings each Sunday afternoon, starting at 1:30 and ending at 4:30, for a total of 16 such elder-member conferences each Sunday afternoon. The church secretary could schedule these elder-member conferences and the members could come to the church building for these conferences one family at a time. In this way, each family would have four 45-minute meetings with two of the elders each year—meeting with different elders each time. In these meetings, the elders can ask how the members are doing, how they are growing spiritually, what problems they may be having, what works they are involved in, and how they feel about various programs of work in the church. Such elder-member conferences can be used for teaching and counseling as well as for communication. Some of the members who are not able to come to the church building for such conferences will need to be visited in their own homes. Such a program takes a lot of effort, but it pays great dividends in terms of improved communication and better attitudes in the congregation.

A different approach that some congregations use is to have a large public meeting of the whole congregation in which the elders discuss some matter which they are considering. The members are then asked to think about

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that matter, study and pray. Then the members are asked to write letters to the elders offering their comments on the matter being considered.

I Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:8 say that elders must be "given to hospitality." One of the best ways for elders to keep in close touch with the members is for the elders to have the members of the church into their homes for fellowship. Elders also need to visit often in the homes of members. In large congregations, there are so many members that elders often are frustrated by the difficulty of getting to know so many people. But if a congregation has 500 members and five elders, the elders could divide the congregation among themselves so that each elder would concentrate on visiting with and really getting to know just 100 of those members. If the elders rotate groups every year, over a period of just five years those elders would get acquainted with the entire congregation. The challenge of getting to know 500 people is so great that an elder might give up and not even try. But if all he has to do is to get acquainted with two members each week for a year, that cuts the job down to a more manageable size.

If you want to know how the members feel about some matter, the best thing to do is to ask them. It is not difficult to prepare a questionnaire which can be mailed to each member. Responses can be made anonymously and the results analyzed statistically in order to give the elders an indication of how the congregation feels.

The idea of anonymous responses bothers some people. They think that a member should be forced to sign his name to any expression of his opinion before the elders will consider it seriously. Some preachers have argued that elders should never consider a complaint against the preacher unless the preacher has the opportunity to confront his accusers and cross-examine them. That is a good strategy to use if you want to stifle any expression of dissent, but it is not a good way of getting communication from the members so that the elders will know how the members really feel.

In this connection, I believe that some preachers have seriously misused the teaching of Mat. 18:15-20 in order to stifle any expression of dissent. According to their doctrine,

if I have a complaint about a preacher (or anyone else), I must first go to him in private and discuss the matter. If I cannot settle things in private, I must go back with one or two witnesses. Only if those efforts fail, do I have the right to take the complaint to the elders of the church. And even then, I have to meet with the elders in the presence of the preacher (or whoever is involved) so that he can confront and cross-examine me. But Mat. 18:15-20 applies only to the situation in which “your brother has sinned *against you*.” Suppose that you believe that a Bible class teacher is teaching error in his class. Suppose that you believe that a preacher is teaching error from the pulpit. Suppose that you do not approve of the way a deacon is administering a particular program of church work. Suppose that you think that a minister just is not doing the work he is supposed to do. In these cases, no one has sinned against you personally. If you feel that you can do some good, you should go to that individual privately. But the Bible does not require you to do so before talking to the elders about the matter. If the situation does not involve a matter in which someone has sinned against you personally and if you do not feel that you could do any good by going to that individual privately, you should feel free to discuss the matter privately with one or more of the elders.

It is not good to stifle the expression of dissent. Elders need to know how the members of the congregation feel about things. When there are problems, the elders should do everything in their power to encourage the members to bring these problems to the attention of the eldership so that the problems can be corrected while they are still small enough to deal with. It is never good to bottle up hostile feelings, hurt feelings, anger, or resentment. Eph. 4:26 says “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” In the marriage counseling work that I have done through the years (specifically as an interpersonal communication counselor), I have called this the “24-hour rule”—“It is not fair to fight about things that happened more than 24 hours ago.” Instead of trying to stifle the expression of dissent, elders need to encourage members to get things out into the open. If you bottle up dissent, some day it will explode.

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Elders need to create a climate of openness. They need to find ways to keep the congregation informed about all major items being considered. They need to find ways to get feedback from the members. In this effort, they need to remember that the more members they can get involved in the formulation of policies and programs the more members they will have committed to the execution of these policies and programs.

Administration

An open style of leadership calls for elders to be good administrators and not just a decision-making body for the congregation. One reason for poor communication in many congregations is that the elders try to do all the day-to-day decision making themselves. No decisions are ever made outside the eldership and few people know what is going on. In order to have the time that is required for the kind of communication discussed earlier, elders need to delegate all the day-to-day decision-making that they can to deacons and others working under their direction. In that way, they will be able to focus their attention on those congregation-wide matters that can be decided only at the eldership level. The eldership should determine the aims, goals, and objectives to be achieved in the various program of work. They should determine the general policy guidelines within which the deacons and others will work in each program. But then they need to turn over the day-to-day decision-making to others.

There are several differences between elders and deacons. One of the main differences has to do with the scope of their work. Elders function in administering the over-all program of church work. Each deacon functions in administering a specific program of work assigned to him by the elders. On issues concerning the relationship among various programs, decision can only be made at the eldership level. However, within each program of work, the day-to-day decision-making should be done by the deacon in charge of that program.

Over the past 30 years, I have spent thousands of hours in elders meetings—first as a preacher, then later as an elder.

In the research and consulting work I have done, I have studied the minutes of the elders meetings in many other congregations. Based on this observation, it is my opinion that at least 90 percent of the time in most elders meetings is spent on this that should never have come to the attention of an eldership at all. I believe that most elderships spend 90 percent of their decision-making time tending to things that should have been tended to at the deaconate level.

Most elderships spend so much of their time tending to the decision-making that should have been delegated to deacons that they never have the time that is needed for the kind of decision-making that should be done at the eldership level. Many elderships never find the time to plan beyond next year's budget. They never have the time to make any long-range plans. They never consider where the church will be 10, 20, 40, or 50 years from now. They never have the time to consider trends in the brotherhood. They never seem to find the time to discuss doctrinal matters. There may be a disagreement between the preacher and the elders on some point of doctrine or perhaps a disagreement within the eldership. But that kind of subject can be put off until a later meeting. Right now what the elders have to consider is that the air conditioner just went out and it has to be repaired before next Sunday. The elders really need to spend some time discussing the spiritual condition of the congregation and the spiritual needs of individual members, but that can be put off until the next meeting. Right now what the elders have to consider is that the plumbing in the ladies rest room leaks and has to be repaired before next Sunday.

What these elderships practice is a kind of "management by crisis." They let their agenda be determined by the problems that demand immediate attention. But those are the matters that should have been delegated to deacons so that the elders could use their time on more important things. These elders actually function as though they were deacons. The deacons do not have anything to do. And no one does the kind of long-range planning and policy-making that the eldership ought to do.

In a congregation where the elders practice an open style of leadership, deacons will be given as much decision-making authority as possible and the congregation will be

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kept informed. Elders ought to prepare a job description telling each deacon what policy guidelines to follow, what decisions he is authorized to make on his own, how much money he is authorized to spend on his own, and when matters should be brought to the attention of the elders. The congregation should be given at least a summary of the job descriptions for each deacon. The members of the congregation should be urged to go first to the deacon in charge of a particular program whenever the members have any questions, comments, suggestions, or complaints about that program.

Some elderships have made the mistake of becoming overly departmentalized and of communicating this departmentalization to the congregation. Although there is a deacon appointed to be "in charge" of each program, there is also an elder who is in charge of the educational program, another elder who is in charge of the benevolent program, another who is in charge of the bus ministry, etc. When that happens, what you really have is elders functioning as senior-level deacons with the deacons relegated to a minor role as junior-level or assistant deacons. If the members of the congregation have some question, suggestion, or complaint about a particular program and they know that a certain elder is in charge of that program, they will go directly to that elder and by-pass the deacon who is also "in charge" of that program. The delegation of tasks to the deacons, therefore, has not helped the elders at all. They are still tied down with the day-to-day decision-making.

Deacons function individually. Elders function as a group—as an eldership. The system of having one elder in charge of one area and another elder in charge of another area is not really Scriptural. It is, in effect, a system of one-man rule in each area rather than rule by the eldership as a whole. As a practical matter, this system tends to promote "empire building," competition, and defensiveness.

For purposes of internal communication, it may be a good idea to divide the deacons among the elders so that each elder can concentrate on keeping the eldership informed about just a few areas of the work. Such liaison assignments, however, should not be published or else the congregation will by-pass the deacons and take all matters to the

elders. Furthermore, within the eldership, such liaison assignments should be viewed only as a method of keeping the eldership informed. It must be the eldership as a whole and not one individual elder in charge of each program. The day-to-day decision-making in specific areas should be delegated to deacons, not to elders. The communication with the congregation should stress the deacon in charge of each program, not the elder who has a temporary liaison assignment in keeping the rest of the elders informed about that program.

If elders will delegate all the day-to-day decision-making that they can to the deacons working under their direction, they will have the time that is required to maintain effective communication with the congregation. They will also have more time for their most important but most neglected role: their work as shepherds.

Shepherding

The spiritual counseling and teaching function suggested by the title "shepherd" or "pastor" is the function most often neglected by elders today. This work has typically been delegated almost totally to the preacher. Preachers can often be very helpful through the counseling work that they do, but this is a work that elders must not neglect. One of the main reasons for the declining growth rate in the churches of Christ is that elders have not functioned as shepherds. Some congregations have a very good conversion rate, but because there is so little shepherding, they also have a very high drop-out rate and as a result their net growth rate is very low.

In later chapters we will discuss the work of shepherding, along with the decision-making and the administrative functions, in much greater detail. For now, what we need to focus on is the way in which an open style of leadership relates to the work of elders as shepherds. And the key point is that the kind of communication that is needed to keep the members informed and to get feedback from the members also functions to keep the elders informed about the spiritual needs of individual members. Effective communication is just as essential to good shepherding as it is to the decision-making process.

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If a congregation has some kind of a zone program in which one person functions as a leader or organizer for the zone, that person can easily keep in touch with the few members in his zone. If one of those members starts missing services or develops some other problems, that zone leader should be able to let an elder know about it in a hurry. Many of the people who have dropped out of the church, according to the survey research that I have done, were not visited by anyone in the congregation until they had already become hardened in their rebellion. The time for a pastoral visit is as soon as possible after the problem develops—not months later when a withdrawal of fellowship is in order.

If a congregation schedules regular elder-member conferences, these meetings can be used for shepherding as well as for communication concerning matters the elders are considering. If the elders have members into their homes and visit in the homes of the members, these visits can serve the function of shepherding as well as fellowship. If the elders keep in close personal contact with the members, then such things as letters from the elders, elders' communication time in worship services, or an elder's page in the bulletin can be used for spiritual teaching and counseling concerning common problems as well as being used to keep the members informed about things the elders are considering. Anything that improves communication in the congregation also improves the spiritual counseling and teaching the elders do as shepherds.

One final comment is needed concerning the relation of an open style of church leadership to the work of shepherding. Elders need to be open in their style of leadership so that the members will feel free to come to them with their problems. But elders must respect the confidence of the members. There are some personal and family problems that do not need to be discussed before the entire congregation. It is true that the church is God's family, but even in families there are things that need to be kept confidential. An open style of leadership does not mean that personal and family problems are made public. But it does mean that elders are open to hear the problems the members have and are willing to do what they can to help. One reason that most members of

the church go to the preacher rather than to the elders with their problems is that the preacher is available and the elders are not. Elders who practice an open style of leadership need to set aside some time when they will be available for counseling with the members.

Conclusion

An open style of leadership is primarily an attitude. It is an effort to be a servant rather than a lord. It works through communication. It is made effective through many efforts to keep the members informed and through many more efforts to get the members involved at the input stage of the decision-making process. Finally, it is made real through the elders who lead by their example, their teaching, and their persuasion—rather than just ordering the members to obey.

Chapter

5

THE DECISION-MAKING FUNCTION OF ELDERS (PRESBYTERS)

The men who are called “elders” in the New Testament church were also called “bishops” or “overseers” (a title which refers to their administrative function) and “pastors” or “shepherds” (a title which refers to their function as spiritual counselors and teachers). The Anglo-Saxon word *elder*, the Latin word *presbyter*, and the word *presbuteros* which was used in the original Greek text of the New Testament—all of these are simply different forms of the same title. They all refer to a decision-making role. In many ways the spiritual counseling and teaching function of pastors or shepherds is the most important and it is certainly the most neglected in the churches of Christ today. The administrative function of bishops or overseers is also very important although it is also neglected much of the time. The decision-making function is perhaps the least important of these three functions. However, it is largely because of problems with the decision-making function that many elderships today do not have the time to function as overseers or shepherds. When decision-making is not done in the right way, it takes up all the available time of an eldership. For that reason, we need to consider the decision-making function of elders in this chapter before we study the administrative function of bishops or overseers in Chapter Six and the spiritual counseling and teaching function of pastors or shepherds in Chapter Seven. In this chapter we will begin with some doctrinal matters that must be considered in regard to the decision-making function of elders, but the primary focus of this chapter will be on some practical suggestions in matter of judgment.

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Doctrinal Matters to Consider

Once a congregation has selected elders, the eldership is the decision-making body for that congregation. Deacons, ministers, teachers, and other workers may exercise some decision-making authority—especially in regard to the day-to-day decision-making associated with their work. However, it must be recognized that their decision-making authority is delegated to them by the eldership. Some people have taught that “elders are in charge of the spiritual matters, but the deacons are in charge of the business affairs of the congregation.” The New Testament does not support this view. In practice it is usually impossible to separate spiritual matters and business matters. A decision to spend money on mission work or benevolent work is not just a business matter, it is a vital part of the spiritual function of the church. A decision to build a new church building or add more classrooms is not just a business matter, it is a decision that directly affects the spiritual life of the congregation. To a large degree, those who control the budget control the spiritual direction of the congregation. It may generally be wise for elders to give deacons and others a major role in preparing budget proposals, but it must be the eldership that makes the final decisions in such matters. Once the budget has been approved by the eldership and the elders have determined the general policy guidelines for each program, the day-to-day decision-making—including decision about spending money—should be delegated to deacons and others working under the supervision of the elders. Elders should not have to spend much of the time in their meetings on such matters. But they must maintain control in such matters in order to control the spiritual affairs of the congregation.

Since an eldership functions as a group in its decision-making, it should go without saying that elders ought to meet regularly. However, some do not. Each elder runs his part of the congregation’s program of work and the left hand never knows what the right hand is doing. Some elderships are so overly departmentalized that they never really function as a group. What they practice is a limited version of one-man rule. No one elder rules the entire program of church work, but within the various programs of work what

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they have is one-man rule. That is not Scriptural. It must be the eldership as a whole that functions as the decision-making body for the congregation.

Some elderships meet, but they have no regularly scheduled meetings. They make all of their decisions in emergency meetings conducted in the aisles after the services or they make their decisions in a series of telephone calls. This may not be a violation of any point of doctrine, but it is most unwise. This is a sure sign of a "management by crisis" approach. Making decisions in a series of telephone calls is especially dangerous. In such a system, the elders do not have a real opportunity to interact with all the other elders. The many benefits of group interaction are lost. Those who may disagree with a proposal have no opportunity to persuade the others to accept their view. Those who are called and told that "all the other elders have already agreed" are put under a tremendous psychological pressure to agree to proposals they would not likely accept otherwise.

If an eldership delegates as much decision-making authority as possible to the various deacons who are in charge of specific programs, there will be little need for emergency meetings and decisions through a series of telephone calls. Most elderships appoint one of their number to serve as chairman and rotate the chairmanship every month, every quarter, or every year. Many elderships delegate to their chairman the authority to make decisions without having to call a meeting when in his judgment such action is absolutely necessary. Any elder who is called upon to make such decisions on his own should be extremely cautious. He can often say, "We have already talked about that in the eldership enough so that I know what the decision of the eldership would be" and then go ahead and approve or disapprove the proposal. But if he is not sure what the other elders would say, he should not be pressured into making a decision without the participation of the other elders. Almost always the quality of the decision is more important than the speed of the decision. It will usually be no more than two or three days until the elders will be together at one of the services of the church. Usually there is little to be lost and much to be gained in waiting until all the elders can be involved in the decision. If the situation really does call for a

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decision at once, it is not all that difficult to arrange a conference telephone call. A conference telephone call is much better than a series of two-party conversations. In general, the only time one elder should make a decision on his own is when the situation really does call for immediate action and the elder who must make the decision is reasonably sure that the other elders would agree.

Congregations often pray to God to guide their elders and help them make wise decisions. Elders almost always begin their meetings praying for God to guide them. The prayer for wisdom is usually a part of the daily prayer of life of individual elders. God gives wisdom to those who pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5). It is important, however, to understand how God works in answering the prayer for wisdom. God no longer gives super-natural revelations of His will to guide men (I Cor. 13:8). Instead, God guides us through His providence. Heb. 5:14 speaks of those fullgrown men "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil." God expects elders to know His word and be guided by that word in all matters of faith. God gives us wisdom through experience and God expects us to use our experience and be guided by our best judgment in things that are matters of judgment and not matters of faith.

Some have incorrectly assumed that there is a natural conflict between faith and reason. That is not what the Bible teaches. Faith, itself, is based on reason. The function of reason is to consider the evidence and reach a logical conclusion. God has never asked men to believe without giving man plenty of evidence and logical reasons for believe.

When elders make decisions, they need to pray for God's guidance as though it all depends on God—because it does. But they should also use the wisdom they have gained through experience and be just as logical and rational as possible as though it all depends on them—because it does. These statements are not contradictory because God guides us through our rational and logical thought processes. Through His providence, God sets before us some open doors of opportunity and He closes other doors. If elders pray for God's guidance and then fail to use the wisdom God has

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given them, they are blocking the very channel through which God has promised to guide them.

Elders should beware of those who claim that God has “called” them to do a certain work, but who cannot provide the evidence or reasons to justify their proposal logically and rationally. If someone comes to an eldership claiming that God has “called” him to begin a blimp ministry and he wants \$1,000,000 from that eldership so that he can buy a blimp to fly it around town with a flashing sign that reads, “Honk if you love Jesus”—one would hope that those elders would make their decision logically, rationally, on the basis of the wisdom they have gained through experience, and deny his request.

Elders must plan with faith in God, but they must beware of those who misuse the doctrine of faith. If a preacher for a congregation of 200 members in a city with a population of 2,000 asks the elders to spend \$10,000,000 to buy a section of land and to erect a building large enough for a crowd of 25,000 people—that preacher might accuse the elders of not having enough “faith” when they deny his request. But that is not a matter of faith at all. It is a matter of judgment. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). You cannot really do by faith that which the word of God has not commanded. The word *faith*, as it is used in the Bible, means far more than confidence, optimism, a positive mental attitude, or the power of positive thinking.

Most elderships, however, do not err in the direction of planning too big. Usually, they plan too small. Often they make their plans only on the basis of what they can do by their own power and do not take God’s will into consideration at all. Most elderships do not have enough confidence in God or in God’s power to work through His people. Most elderships do not challenge the members enough. For that reason, most Christians have not really begun to learn the real meaning of discipleship or stewardship. Many elderships have planned new church buildings that were filled as soon as they were built. But what has happened in these cases is not really that the elders lacked faith in God since this is not really a matter of faith. What they lacked was good judgment.

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Effective leadership requires that the elders be out in front challenging the congregation by their example, their teaching, and their persuasion. Elders must not be so far out in front that they lose touch with the congregation and the members lose sight of their leaders. But that is not what usually happens. The typical situation is quite different. Many elderships are more like the man on the way to the camp meeting grounds. He came through town and asked some people if they had seen a group of people heading toward the camp meeting grounds. They told him that such a group had passed through town about four hours earlier. The man then said, "I have to hurry to catch up with them. I am their leader." Most elderships do not need to worry about being too far out in front, but many should be concerned about catching up.

Practical Suggestions in Matter of Judgment

There are two main reasons that many elderships are inefficient in their decision-making. First, they do not prepare properly for the elders meetings. Second, they do not conduct the elders meetings in an orderly manner. It must be understood, of course, that these are not matters of faith. The Bible does not tell us how elders should prepare for their meetings or how they should conduct their meetings. The suggestions presented in this section are matters of judgment, not matters of faith. In Lk. 16:8, Jesus said "the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light." There are some methods of preparing for and conducting a decision-making meeting that people in the secular world have found to be effective. These are the things that I want to share with you in this section. I believe that these practical suggestions will help an eldership get far more done in far less time. Such efficiency should help elders find the time that they need to function as overseers and as shepherds.

Most elders go into their meetings with some thought of the things they want to propose, but with no knowledge of what others want to propose. Many go into their meetings with only a dim recollection of the things discussed and

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decided upon in their previous meetings. In short, most elders do not prepare for their meetings.

In order to prepare for a meeting, you need to have some idea of what things will be discussed in that meeting. You need an agenda of the items to be discussed. Whoever is serving as the chairman for the elders meeting needs to prepare an agenda and distribute it several days before each meeting. Well in advance of each meeting, the chairman should contact the other elders and the deacons, ministers, and others who may be involved in order to find out what things need to be considered at the next elders meeting. If deacons, ministers, or others are going to attend some part of the next elders meeting to make reports or proposals, those reports or proposals should be written well in advance with copies distributed to each elder. There is no good reason to take up the time of an elders meeting with the presentation of detailed reports and proposals that each elder could have read and studied before the meeting. If all the elders do is to hear oral reports and proposals in their meeting, they do not really have the time that is required to study, reflect, and think seriously about the report or proposal. They do not have the opportunity to prepare for the meeting.

As soon as possible after each elders meeting, each elder should be given a copy of the minutes of the meeting. This is helpful in preparing for the next meeting and it is especially helpful for any elder who had to miss the last meeting. Many elderships find it useful to prepare a special brief case or at least a notebook for each elder. The agenda, minutes, reports, proposals, financial statements, and other important documents can be kept in these notebooks or brief cases. Each elder can take that material with him and study it whenever he has some free time at work or at home. Having such material readily available helps each elder prepare for the elders meetings.

An efficient church office can be a great time-saver for the elders. Workers in the church office can prepare reports for the elders on the records concerning membership and attendance figures, contribution totals, and responses. They can keep individual attendance records and let the elders know about members who are not attending regularly. They

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can coordinate reports from zone leaders and let the elders know about members who are having problems.

Whenever possible, the elders should have an office in the church building where they can conduct their meetings, keep their files, and have all the records they need readily available for their use. There are many kinds of file systems, visual displays, and computer programs that can make it easy for the elders to have all the information that they need and have it available to them. If elders have an efficient office at the church building and a brief case or notebook that they can take with them for preparation at work or at home, it will be much easier for elders to prepare for their meetings.

An even greater problem than a lack of preparation before elders meetings is that many elderships do not conduct their meetings in an efficient and orderly manner. Many elderships have never even taken the time to discuss how their meetings should be conducted. They have just drifted into a routine.

Probably the most inefficient way of conducting an elders meeting—but one that many elderships use—is just to go around the room and let each elder bring up whatever he wants to bring up. Many elderships spend most of their meeting time on minor items and have very little time left for the major items—simply because the major items did not come up until late in the meeting when they finally got far enough around the room to get to the elder who wanted to bring up those most important items. The chairman of the elders meeting should cover the agenda in an orderly manner. Whenever possible, the most important items should be considered early in the meeting.

The most efficient and orderly way of conducting a decision-making meeting is known as parliamentary procedure. Unfortunately, parliamentary procedure has gained a bad reputation because of the way some politicians use the tricks of parliamentary procedure for deceptive and manipulative purposes. But parliamentary procedure was never intended to be used for such purposes. Whenever a group meets for the purpose of presenting proposals, discussing them, and arriving at decisions, parliamentary procedure is not only helpful but indispensable. Strict enforcement of

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parliamentary law is absolutely essential in large legislative bodies. In a small group, such as an eldership, a much more informal approach is possible. However, even with an informal approach, the basic principles of parliamentary procedure still need to be understood and followed. An eldership can often be informal enough to bend or even break some of the rules and still function efficiently. But it is always dangerous to break the rules unless you clearly understand the rules to begin with.

Actually there are only a few logical principles that underlie parliamentary procedure. If you have a thorough understanding of the principles, you seldom need to memorize the rules. In the following paragraphs, we will consider some of these principles and apply them to the eldership.

All members of a decision-making body have equal rights, privileges, and obligations. The vote of the majority decides. Whenever more than a majority vote is required, control passes from the majority to the minority. Some elderships have made a serious mistake in assuming that unanimous agreement is required before they can act. When an eldership takes that approach, one elder can block action on anything. That is simply a negative version of one-man rule and one-man rule is not Scriptural. It is wise for an eldership to strive for consensus, but unanimous consent is not required for action. The way to reach consensus is to compromise. When two opposing views are presented, the thing to do is to look for all possible points between the opposing views. If you can find a compromise position between the opposing views and that compromise position is acceptable to all, then you have reached a consensus. But if you cannot find a compromise position that is acceptable to everyone, the majority must have the right to go ahead and act. To do otherwise is to surrender control to the minority.

I knew of a elder years ago who had to be drug kicking and screaming into the twentieth century. He had witnessed many changes in the methods used in the church and had opposed every one of them. Whenever the eldership discussed a proposal to do something in a new or different way, he could always be counted on to object. After much discussion in which he tried but failed to persuade his fellow-

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elders to see things his way, after the majority voted in favor of the proposal, he would always say, "Well, brethren, I was agin it, but now I'm fur it." And he would leave that elders meeting and work just as hard as any of the other elders to make the proposal work.

The majority in a decision-making body has the right to be assured that their decisions will not be overturned by the minority acting alone. For that reason, a quorum is always required before the group can make decisions. I once knew of a congregation with seven elders. Three of the elders wanted to fire the preacher and four did not. One time the three elders who wanted to get rid of the preacher attended Wednesday evening services when all the other four elders were out of town. As soon as they realized the nature of the situation, they called an emergency elders meeting and fired the preacher. One of the elders who was out of town died before he could return. That left the eldership with a three-to-three deadlock and the three remaining elders who wanted to keep the preacher could not vote to hire him back. These brethren were unable to resolve their conflict the way Christians should and they took the matter to court. The courts have often ruled that every decision-making body conducts its business subject to the rules of parliamentary procedure—whether or not they are aware of it. And in this case the judge ruled that the action of the three elders who fired the preacher was illegal since they did not have a quorum. Not enough elders were present at that meeting to make their decisions legally binding.

One important principle of parliamentary procedure is that the minority has rights which must be protected in the interest of the entire group. The most important right of the minority is their right to try to persuade others in the group to see things their way. Any effort to limit this right requires a two-thirds vote rather than a simple majority vote according to parliamentary law. The majority has the right to protect itself against the effort of a small minority to block action. For that reason, if a person keeps bringing up the same proposal again and again and the majority keeps defeating it again and again, a member of the group can object to consideration of that proposal the next time it is

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brought up. But to protect the rights of the minority, the motion objecting to consideration requires a two-thirds vote. A motion to suspend the rules requires a two-thirds vote for the same reason. Sometimes before a discussion starts, someone might want to limit the discussion to a certain period of time, but the motion to vote immediately and thus end the discussion also requires a two-thirds vote. These are the only motions in all of parliamentary procedure that require more than a simply majority vote and the reason that a two-thirds vote is required in these cases is to protect the right of the minority to discuss all issues fully and freely.

A principle of parliamentary procedure that is just good common sense is that a decision-making group can discuss only one question at a time. Several years ago I was doing some consulting work with an organization in which the board of directors was spending far too much time in their meetings and not usually getting much done in those meetings. The first board meeting that I observed quickly demonstrated the problem. At one time they had 12 different motions on the floor and they were trying to discuss and decide upon all 12 of them at once. I have seen elders meetings where things were even more confused than that. At least in this board of directors these men knew the value of making a formal motion. I have seen many elderships in which the tradition was so strongly opposed to anything that even sounded like parliamentary procedure that no one would ever make a motion. They would just talk about things for hours until everyone thought that they had come to an agreement. As it turned out, often they had not come to an agreement—but since they had never actually voted on a formal motion, they had no way of knowing for sure whether they agreed or disagreed. The reason that a formal proposal is called a “motion” in parliamentary procedure is that this is what it takes to get things moving. Many elderships could cut their meeting time at least in half and reduce their misunderstandings even more than that if they would simply adopt the practice of making formal motions, discussing them one at a time, and then deciding by majority vote on those motions.

There is a definite and logical order of precedence which

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governs the introduction and disposition of all motion. If someone makes a specific proposal in the form of a main motion, someone else makes a motion to amend the proposal, then someone makes a motion to postpone consideration until the next meeting, and finally someone makes a motion to adjourn—the group must first vote on the motion to adjourn, if that fails they must vote on the motion to postpone consideration until the next meeting, if that fails they must vote on the amendment, and then finally they vote on the main motion. Really it is not as complicated as it may appear. Any good text book on parliamentary procedure outlines the principles governing the precedence of motions. All elders should study these principles. The idea is not to get things all tied up in parliamentary knots—but simply to untie the knots that elderships often get into because of a failure to follow these logical rules. In the informal atmosphere of an elders meeting, these rules can often be broken. But you need to know the rules and the reasons behind the rules before you can break the rules without getting into trouble.

There is no law in the Bible that says that elders must follow the rules of parliamentary procedure, but elders do need to follow some logical order in their meetings. The rules of parliamentary procedure are really just some common sense principles discovered through many years of experience in decision-making groups looking for the most orderly way of conducting their affairs. Unless an eldership has a better way of doing things, it would seem unwise to reject this proven system without at least trying to learn its advantages.

There is no law in the Bible that says what pattern an elders meeting should follow, but there should be some pattern. Perhaps this is not really what Paul was talking about in I Cor. 14:40 when he said, “Let all things be done decently and in order,” but at least the general principle applies. There is a general pattern of meetings in parliamentary procedure. Unless an eldership has a better way of doing things, that pattern would be a good one to follow. Here is that pattern as adapted for use in an elders meeting.

1. Call to order and opening prayer.

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2. Correction and/or approval of the minutes of the previous elders meeting which have been distributed to each elder before the meeting.
3. Reports of deacons, ministers, or others in connection with their regular assignments in the congregation's organizational structure.
4. Reports of deacons, ministers, or others in connection with special temporary assignments.
5. Unfinished business from the last elders meeting.
6. New business taken up in order of importance as listed in the printed agenda distributed to each elder before the meeting.
7. New business not included in the printed agenda.
8. Closing prayer and adjournment.

In addition to following an orderly pattern in the meeting as a whole, elders need to follow an orderly pattern in their discussion of specific issues. The following problem-solving agenda has been found to be of great value to many decision-making groups. Following these steps in the discussion can greatly reduce the amount of time required for the discussion and greatly increase the quality of the decisions reached in that discussion.

1. Define the problem.
2. Determine the causes of the problem situation.
3. Establish the criteria by which possible solutions will be evaluated.
4. Discover the possible solutions.
5. Apply the criteria in order to select the best solution.
6. Plan the implementation of the solution.
7. Appoint specific people to carry out specific tasks.

At first glance, this seven-step problem-solving agenda seems to be a very different approach from the system of making formal motions, discussing them, and voting on them. Actually the difference is not all that great. What the problem-solving agenda does is to guide the discussion that might lead to the presentation of a formal motion and also guide the discussion that comes after the formal motion is presented. Most decision-making groups that simply make motions, debate them, and vote on them, tend to be polarized

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quickly into opposing factions. Eldershops need to avoid that kind of polarization.

The best kind of agenda for an elders meeting is the agenda that lists the problems to be discussed along with whatever background information elders need to study the problems. When specific proposals have already been made, they should be included in the agenda. In the actual discussion, however, it is not best to begin with the formal presentation of motions. The place to start is with a clear definition of the problem that needs to be solved. A problem clearly defined is half solved. You are not likely to solve a problem if you do not know what caused the problem situation. That is why the second step in this problem-solving agenda is so important.

Sometimes these first two steps can be the most creative stage of the problem-solving process. A company that owned a new high-rise office building called a consultant from an elevator company. They said that their problem was how to add more elevators. People were complaining about the long delays while waiting for an elevator. The consultant studied the problem and reported that there was no practical way to add more elevators. But he asked, "Are you sure that this is really your problem?" They thought about it a while and said, "No, our real problem is just how to move people from the first floor to the floors above faster than we are able to right now." So the consultant went back and studied several alternatives, but he came back with a report that there was no practical way to move people from the first floor to the higher floors any faster. Once again he asked, "Are you sure that you have correctly defined your problem and determined the causes of the problem situation?" They said that they were positive. But then the consultant said, "I don't think that you have." The consultant then offered a proposal which he claimed would solve their problem. He said, "Put mirrors all around the waiting area near the elevators on the first floor." They thought that he was crazy. But he explained that he had done a study in which he found that no one was ever having to wait more than 90 seconds for an elevator. He claimed that a 90 second delay was not at all unreasonable. This consultant had decided that the real

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problem was simply that people were bored during the 90 second delay. He reasoned that people are most interested in looking at themselves and next most interested in looking at other people. He said that if they would install those mirrors, the complaints would stop. Reluctantly they agreed to do as the consultant had suggested and, sure enough, the complaints stopped at once. Be sure that you start the discussion with a good, clear definition of the problem and an effort to determine the causes of the problem situation.

The third step in this problem-solving agenda, "Establish the criteria by which possible solutions will be evaluated," is the most neglected step of all. What most groups do is to rush into proposing various solutions. The trouble with proposing solutions before you have established the criteria by which possible solutions will be evaluated is that it tends to polarize the group. Suppose that a congregation is having parking problems. Their parking lot is full and the lack of parking space is hindering their growth. One elder suggests building a parking garage all around the church building. Another elder proposes buying some land a mile away and using a shuttle-bus to bring people from the parking lot to the building. A third elder suggests starting a new congregation that would take one third of the present members away from the present congregation. A fourth elder suggests selling the present building and constructing a new building with plenty of parking space. The elder who favors the parking garage could make a strong argument on the basis of convenience, but his plan would be expensive. The second elder who favors the shuttle-bus from a distant parking lot could make a strong argument on the basis of economy, but his plan would not be very convenient. The third elder who favors taking one third of the members to start a new congregation might argue that such a plan would be more convenient for those who live near the new congregation, but unless the present congregation is already very large, such a plan might seriously weaken the present congregation. You might end up with two small congregations that are not really able to launch a very effective program of evangelism. The fourth elder who favors building a new building at a new location might argue on the basis of how much work a larger

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congregation in that new location could do, but this plan would be the most expensive of all. What will happen in that kind of debate is that each elder will argue on the basis of the criterion that favors his proposal: convenience, economy, growth potential, etc. If you can decide on the criteria first, then it will be much easier to decide on the specific proposals.

Consider another illustration. A congregation is looking for a preacher. They have four men "try out" and they try to reach a decision. Some like the first man because he is young. Some like the second man because he is experienced. Others like the third man because of his successful record. And still others like the fourth man because he is already drawing social security and they will not have to pay him much. No matter which man gets the job, the majority of the people wanted someone else. When elders need to hire a preacher, the first thing they ought to do, after careful consultation with the congregation, is to determine the qualifications they want. Then they ought to go looking for a man who has those qualifications. Instead of having him come to "try out," they ought to drop in to visit him in his home congregation. Once they have found the man they think will do, then they need to bring him in for a visit so that they can see how the congregation reacts. And they need to consider only one man at a time. A "parade of prospective preachers" always produces polarization. In this matter as in all other problem-solving efforts, establish the criteria before you start looking at solutions. First of all decide how you will decide.

Notice that the fourth step in this problem-solving agenda is *discover* the possible solutions, not *propose* possible solutions. This is not yet the time for advocacy. This is the time for discovery. Brainstorming is a useful technique at this stage. Temporarily suspend critical judgment. Do not evaluate ideas at all. Do not concentrate on the quality, but rather on the quantity of ideas. Try to come up with as many ideas as possible—no matter how unreasonable some may be. Try to take the ideas suggested by others and break them apart or combine them in different ways. Let the ideas suggested by others trigger ideas in your own mind. Chain onto the ideas suggested by others. This brainstorming

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process takes only a few minutes, but in those few minutes you can generate a large number of ideas. It may be that 90 percent of those ideas will be bad. But the 10 percent of those ideas that are good will usually include more and better ideas that you would come up with if you had not used the brainstorming technique.

If you have followed all of these steps, the next step will be relatively easy. You simply take the criteria that you agreed upon and apply them to the list of possible solutions and select the best solution.

This is where many elderships stop. After all, they have all agreed upon the solution. What more is there to do? I have been in many elders meetings in which we spent hours discussing some problem and finally agreed upon a solution. But when we came to the elders meeting the next week, we found that nothing had been done! Why? Simply because we had not planned the implementation of the solution and no one had been appointed to carry out the specific tasks needed to implement that solution. What is everybody's business is nobody's business.

Sometimes the longest phase of the problem-solving process is planning the implementation of the solution. This is where careful attention must be given to the allocation of available funds and available workers. This is where a budget can be important and where elders must remember that they cannot spend money without either raising more funds or taking funds away from some other budget area. This is also where elders must be careful to develop and maintain a balanced program of church work. Sometimes a person who is pushing for the rapid expansion of a particular program thinks that the elders are trying to hinder his efforts and put on the brakes when really all that the elders are trying to do is to keep their hands on the steering wheel. As long as available funds and workers are limited, elders must be careful to allocate both funds and workers in such a way as to develop a balanced program of church work. They must realize that a decision to spend more money and use more workers in one area usually means that less money and fewer workers will be available for other areas.

Many legislative bodies require several readings of a

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proposed law before final approval. A modification of that approach would be useful in an eldership. The first reading of a proposal in an eldership should be limited to a consideration of whether or not that proposal is what those elders think God would want them to do. Elders need to start their deliberations by looking at the spiritual needs of the congregation and finding ways to meet those needs. It should be against the rules on the first reading to ask "Can we afford it?" or "Do we have enough workers to get the job done?" The only question that should be considered on first reading should be "Does God want us to do it?"

Having a first and second reading of proposals before final approval gives an eldership an opportunity to let the members know what is being considered. It gives the members time to make comments, suggestions, and, in general, let the elders know how they feel about the proposal. In some boards of directors and executive committees, there is a rule that the group must decide whether proposals should be decided by the group acting on its own or taken to the entire membership before the final decision. It would be a good idea for elderships to adopt a similar approach. In some decision-making bodies, the rule is that all proposals must be taken to the membership to get their reaction before a final decision is made. In order to pass a proposal on first reading, the decision-making body must have a two-thirds vote in favor of suspending this rule. Regardless of how an eldership does this, it would be a good idea for the eldership to have some way of deciding what matters need to be presented to the congregation before a final decision is made.

If an eldership decides that a particular proposal needs to be presented to the congregation before the eldership makes a final decision, that would clearly require a first and second reading of the proposal. On the second reading, the elders could ask "How can we raise the money to pay for it?" and "How can we recruit the workers needed to get the job done?" But then they would be considering those issues with the input they had received from the congregation. Many great ideas never saw the light of day because some elder asked "Can we afford it?" or "Do we have enough workers to get the job done?" before it was time to ask these questions.

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Conclusion

The suggestions presented in the previous section are matters of judgment, not matters of faith. There is no law in the Bible that says that elders have to do things in this way. But they have to do things in *some* way and this way is much more effective and efficient than the way in which many elderships function in their decision-making. If an eldership will start to keep the members more fully informed, get more input from the members before they make their decisions, do more to prepare for their meetings, and conduct their meetings in a more orderly manner—several good results will follow: the quality of their decisions will improve greatly; they will spend much less time in their decision-making meetings; they will have more time to function as overseers and shepherds; the members will be more involved; and the church will begin to grow.

Chapter

6

THE ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTION OF BISHOPS (OVERSEERS)

In Titus 1:5, Paul said that elders should be appointed in every city. He then lists qualifications men must have if they are to be selected as elders (Titus 1:6-9). In the midst of this list of qualifications for the eldership, Paul says, "For the bishop must be blameless" (Titus 1:7). It would not make any sense to discuss the qualifications of a bishop in this section discussing the qualification of elders unless the titles "elder" and "bishop" were simply different titles for the same office.

Episkopos is the word used in the original Greek text of the New Testament. This word comes from *epi*, meaning "over," and *skopeo*, meaning "to look or watch." The Anglo-Saxon word *overseer* is the most literal translation. *Superintendent* is an English word of Latin origin with the same meaning. *Bishop* is another English word that came from the Greek by way of the Latin and its meaning is identical.

Our English versions speak of "the office of a bishop" in I Tim. 3:1. Actually the original Greek text does not have a word for "office" in this passage. Instead, the Greek text has the word *episkopee*. The literal translation is "if any one seeks overseership." But it is clear that a bishop or overseer in the New Testament church had a leadership role and thus an office in the ordinary sense of that term.

I Pet. 5:1-4, which was addressed to elders (presbyters) and which told them to pastor (shepherd) the church, uses the word *episkopeo*, which is simply the verb form for the word bishop or overseer—"exercising the oversight" (I Pet. 5:2). All of these words in their various forms refer to what is commonly called an administrative or a supervisory function.

The board of directors or the board of trustees in secular organizations has an administration or supervisory func-

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tion which parallels the work of bishops in the New Testament church. Some writers have recently criticized elderships for acting like a board of directors. That criticism is not totally justified. Many elderships function only as a decision-making body and that is wrong, but a good board of directors does not function primarily as a decision-making body. I have served on the board of directors or the board of trustees of a good many organizations and in my work as a consultant in organizational communication I have observed many other such boards. When a board functions properly, it delegates most of the day-to-day decision-making authority to others and limits its decision-making role to the most important policy issues. The primary function of a board in the secular world is to administer or supervise the work that is done by those exercising delegated decision-making authority. Most elderships could be criticized for failing to perform the kind of administrative or supervisory function performed by efficient boards in the secular world.

The function of an administrative body is not to do all the decision-making, but rather to supervise the work that is done by those who are exercising decision-making authority delegated to them by that administrative body. The typical eldership does not delegate enough real decision-making authority to have anything to supervise. A foreman directs workers to make sure that tasks are accomplished. An administrator supervises decision-makers. Both are classified in the secular world as having management positions, but the functions of a foreman are quite different from those of an administrator. To some degree, the work of deacons parallels the function of foremen, but bishops are not foremen, they are administrators.

The work of administrators in the secular world is often outlined under the headings called "The Five 'Izes' of Good Administration." These five functions are to visualize, organize, deputize, supervise, and analyze. Throughout this chapter, the work of bishops or overseers in the church will be discussed under these five headings.

Visualize

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18).

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Bishops of the Lord's church must be men of vision. To visualize means to determine the aims, goals, and objectives to be achieved. Many congregations lack direction because their elders have functioned only as a decision-making body and they have never found the time to function as bishops. They have never planned beyond the next year's budget. They have never given any serious consideration to where the church has been, where it is, and where it is headed. They have never thought about where the congregation will be 10, 20, 50, or 100 years from now.

Many congregations just "meet and keep house for the Lord." Their leaders never really evaluate the over-all program of church work to make sure that the purposes of the church are being accomplished. The purpose of the church is to glorify God through worship, through work to help the needy, through the kind of evangelism that persuades people to become Christians, and through the kind of edification by means of spiritual teaching and counseling that helps Christians grow day to day to become more and more like Christ.

Many elderships never evaluate specific programs in order to make sure that the goals are being achieved. They just keep on doing the same thing in the same way because that is the way they have always done it. They often fail to consider what it is that they are trying to achieve through the activity.

Some congregations conduct two or three eight-day, two-Sunday gospel meetings every year simply because that is what they have always done. Those who are "successful" fill their buildings with members from neighboring congregations, but few non-members attend to hear the sermons addressed to non-members. Most congregations cannot even get their own members, much less the non-members to attend these traditional gospel meetings. When that happens, bishops ought to consider what it is that they are trying to accomplish and see if there is some way that they can accomplish that purpose more effectively.

Most of our congregations have been conducting Bible classes for so long that they have forgotten why they have them. If their goal is simply to conduct classes, then they are

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successful—but surely there is a higher goal. If their goal is to get people to attend classes, most congregations are only marginally successful—but surely there is a higher purpose. If the goal is to teach factual information about the Bible, most congregations are not very successful at all and most would have no way of knowing for sure if they were successful. In these classes, they never give any homework, they never give any tests, they never get any feedback to tell them whether or not the students are learning. If the goal in these classes is to change lives, then most congregations are even less successful. Over half of our own children drop out of the church as soon as they grow up and leave home. Over half of our adult converts drop out of the church within a few months after their baptism. And the level of spirituality, holiness, discipleship, and stewardship of those who remain does not indicate that our Bible classes are very successful in achieving the goal of changing lives. In many of our Bible classes, the typical student is never really challenged. They do not learn anything new. They just “rehearse the doctrine” at a very shallow level week after week. Bishops need to ask themselves what they are trying to accomplish through their Bible classes and see if there are not some ways in which these goals can be achieved more effectively.

These examples of gospel meetings and Bible classes are but two of many areas in which bishops need to visualize the goals they are trying to achieve in the various programs of church work. To visualize means to get a clear picture of the ways things will be when programs have been successful and problems have been solved. But in addition to a vision of the long range goal in a particular program, bishops also need a vision of what things will be like at various points along the way. Congregations need long range, intermediate, and short range goals. When a congregation makes enough progress that they are about to achieve the first short range goal, a higher short range goal must be set before them. Throughout the process, the intermediate and long range goals should also be presented in such a way that the congregation has a sense of direction.

Some bishops see the importance of setting goals, but they set such vague and general goals that they can never

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tell when they have reached them. A goal to be "a better congregation" this year than last is too vague. You might be able to look back from eternity and know whether or not that goal was achieved, but it is too general to provide any knowledge of results when that knowledge is needed. A goal to "baptize more people than we baptized last year" is a little better. At least you can know whether you succeeded or not. But a goal to increase the number of baptisms by an average of 25 percent per year over the next four years would be better. It is more specific.

The first thing that bishops need to do as good administrators is to consider the spiritual needs and problems in the congregation and visualize specifically what things will be like once those needs have been met and those problems have been solved. Once they have a clear picture in mind of that final objective and of all the stops along the way, they are ready to move on to the next step in good administration.

Organize

To organize means to plan the work that must be done to reach the goals. Organization means a division of labor and an allocation of resources to accomplish a purpose. Visualizing or planning is the process of defining goals or ends to be achieved and organizing is the process of establishing the means through which the ends or goals will be achieved.

A system called "PERT" (Program Evaluation and Review Technique) was developed in government and has been used widely in industry. This general approach would help bishops organize various program of work. The first step in this approach is to picture the project once it is successfully completed. The second step is to work back in time and determine all the things that must be done to reach the goal. There are usually several lines of activity that must converge for the final goal to be achieved. Each of these paths involves a series of things that must be done and an order in which they must be done for the final goal to be achieved. These paths must be studied in order to determine which is the longest. This is called the "critical path." Sometimes workers and funds must be transferred from other paths in

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order to get the critical path finished on time. This "PERT" system, which is also called the "critical path method," is sometimes called the "decision tree method" since each point on the various paths represent a time when "go" or "no go" decisions must be made.

In order to illustrate what is involved in using this system, let us suppose that the bishops of a congregation decide to try a different approach to an evangelistic meeting. Before they can have a meeting, they need a speaker. Before they can get a speaker, they must decide whom to ask. Before they can make that decision, they need to know what kind of meeting they want to have. Before they can decide what kind of meeting they want to have, they must consider their situation and the purposes they want to achieve. Before they make that decision, they might want to have a committee study the matter and report back to them. Before the committee can do its work, the committee must first be appointed and given its charge.

Another important path that must be developed concerns getting the people to attend. In order to get their own members to attend, they would need to plan their advertising campaign within their local congregation and that might involve several important steps. The best way to get the members of a congregation to support such a meeting (or any other project) is to get them involved in formulating the plan in the first place. So here is a point where two paths might meet. The committee appointed to study this matter might want to seek input from the congregation before they prepare their report.

Suppose that as the committee discusses this matter with the congregation, they find that one of the major concerns their members have—and also a major concern among non-members—has to do with family problems. As they study the matter in more detail, the committee might discover that communication problems are the biggest problem area in families. They might then come up with a proposal to have a "Family Communication Workshop" in which a speaker could present Christ-centered, Bible-based messages on God's plan for improving husband-wife communication and parent-child communication. They might suggest that such

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an approach would do a lot of good for the members of the congregation and would also get non-members to attend much more than non-members would ever attend a traditional gospel meeting. They might suggest that such a meeting would provide a valuable point of contact with many non-members and that this point of contact could be used in a follow-up program designed to attend the services of the church, attend Bible classes, take part in a home Bible study course, or enroll for a Bible correspondence course.

In order to get the non-members to attend such a meeting, the congregation would first need to plan some kind of advertising campaign. Before the advertisements could be run in the local paper or aired on local radio and television stations, the copy would have to be prepared. If they wanted a picture of the speaker, they would first have to contact him and get him to send a picture. If they wanted to get local news coverage, they would first need to prepare the material and contact local radio and television stations and the local newspaper.

Another important path that would need to be considered would be concerned with the place for this meeting. That would be relatively easy if they decided to use the church building. But they might decide that non-members would be more likely to attend if they had sessions on Friday evening, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, and Saturday night in some place other than the church building and then finished the meeting with Sunday services at the church building. If they made that decision, they would need to make the necessary physical arrangements to prepare the place for the meeting. Before they could do that, they would need to have a contract for the use of the meeting facility. Before they could sign the contract, they would need a decision as to the exact date for the meeting. Even before all of this, they would need to select the location. They might need to begin by assigning a committee to search for a location and present a report.

But suppose that all of these things were done and the meeting was a great success in terms of attendance and interest. Remember that one of the main purposes of this meeting was to make contacts for further evangelistic work

in a follow-up program. That entire effort would fail if they did not prepare for their follow-up program well in advance. I knew of an evangelistic campaign in a large city where workers set up hundreds and hundreds of cottage meetings only to discover when the campaign was over that they had so few trained workers in the congregations of that city that it would have taken them 20 years to get around to all the cottage meetings that had been set up. Before a successful follow-up program could be conducted in the kind of meeting we are considering in this illustration, it would first have to be planned. Material would have to be printed or purchased. Workers would have to be recruited and trained. As bishops studied the plans for such a meeting, they might find that planning, preparation, and training for the follow-up program would be the critical path. They might have to delay or modify other parts of the project in order to get this vital element completed in time for the campaign.

People in government and industry who use this "PERT" system employ a rather complicated formula for a statistical analysis identifying the critical path. Such an approach would almost never be necessary in the kind of planning bishops do in local congregations. But the general approach of the "PERT" system would be most useful. The secret of this approach is to think backward in time. Start with the project as it will be when completed and then work back through all the steps in each path that is needed to reach the final goal. The usual approach is to start with only a vague idea of the ultimate goal and with no thought given to the steps in each path needed to reach that goal. That leads to a "management by crisis" approach. A little time spent planning and organizing will save a lot of time and trouble later on. Furthermore, you end up doing a better job that way.

Once bishops have done the planning and organizing that is needed, they should prepare what people in the secular business world call "job descriptions." The deacons, ministers, and others who are given specific assignments in a program of church work need to be told the over-all objectives of the program, how that program relates to other activities of the congregation, what general policy guide-

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lines that individual needs to follow, what decisions that person is authorized to make on his own, how much money he can spend on his own, and what matters need to be brought back to the bishops for their approval. Generally the entire congregation should be given at least a brief summary of each job description—especially in regard to the regular assignments of the various deacons and ministers. That kind of open communication will help the members know who to see with their questions, comments, suggestions, and complaints. But the main thing that it will do is to get the members more involved. Communication is the key to involvement.

Deputize

The third step in the traditional “Five ‘Izes’ of Good Administration” really ought to be *delegate*—but that did not rhyme and so the word *deputize* was used instead. Whatever it is called, this third step is the most important but most neglected step in the entire process. The main reason that so many elderships never have the time to function as administrators or as spiritual teachers and counselors is that they never delegate enough decision-making authority to the deacons, ministers, and others working under their direction. I have known deacons who have served in the deaconate for years without ever being given a specific assignment. I have known many others who had been given specific assignments without ever being given any decision-making authority—even in the most trivial matters.

Bishops need to consider seriously the wise counsel Jethro gave to Moses in Ex. 18:13-28. Moses was busy from morning until night serving as the only decision-maker for Israel. Jethro suggested that this was bad, not only for Moses, but also for the people. No man could make really good decisions with such a burden. Furthermore, Moses had more important things that he needed to do. Jethro urged Moses to appoint rulers over the people in such a way that one man ruled 1,000 people. At the next level, one ruler would be over 100 people. At the third level, one ruler would be over

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50 people. And at the lowest level, one ruler would be over 10 people. Problems were taken first to the ruler over 10. If he could not solve the problem, it was taken to the ruler over 50. If the problem still was not solved, it was taken to the ruler over 100. If that ruler was not able to solve the problem, it was taken to the ruler over 1,000. And only those problems that could not be solved through this process were taken to Moses for his consideration.

It was because of this system of delegation that Moses was able to be an effective leader. He could thus deal with the problems that demanded his attention. He could consider those issues which could be decided only at his level. The same thing applies to an eldership. No eldership can make all the decisions for a congregation and do a good job of their decision-making. If they try, their decisions will often be bad. Furthermore, if they try, they will have no time to function as administrators or as spiritual teachers and counselors.

The art of delegation is one of the most difficult arts for any leader. A leader needs to delegate enough decision-making authority to share the burden with others and to get others involved. But a leader needs to give enough direction in order to maintain the necessary control. It is usually best to start by delegating only limited decision-making authority with very detailed guidelines. After a person has gained experience and confidence, leaders can delegate more decision-making authority with fewer policy guidelines. It is important to delegate a series of successes. In the long run, it is much more important that the talents and the confidence of a deacon be developed than that a particular job be done. If a deacon is first given a relatively small delegation of decision-making authority in a job that is easy to perform, his success in that experience will give him more confidence and he will be ready to take on more responsibility. Elders should not delegate decision-making authority to a deacon or anyone else until they are ready for him to do the job in his own way (within the policy guidelines given by the eldership). Do not delegate decision-making authority until you are ready to let the person who is given that decision-making authority use his own judgment and do things in a way that

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might be different from the way you would do it. As long as the decision is within the general policy guidelines given by the eldership, a deacon should be free to make the best decisions that he can on his own. Do not delegate decision-making authority until you are ready to support the person if and when he makes mistakes. Do not delegate decision-making authority and then take it back at the first sign of trouble—or, what happens more often, take back the delegation of authority at the first sign of originality. The leadership ability, creativity, and energy of many deacons and ministers has been stifled by elders who delegated some decision-making authority and then took it back at the first word of criticism from some member of the congregation.

Supervise

Of all the steps in the traditional “Five ‘Izes’ of Good Administration,” this is the one that comes the closest to the literal meaning of *bishop* or *overseer*. Planning, organizing, and delegating must precede the work that is done. Supervising occurs as plans are put into operation. Once an eldership has determined what work it wants done, what goals it wants achieved, what policy guidelines it wants followed, and what decision-making authority it wants exercised by a deacon, minister, or other member of the church—then and only then is it really in a position to supervise.

Supervision requires effective two-way communication. Bishops must get the information that tells them whether or not the goals are being achieved, whether or not the policy guidelines are being followed, and whether or not the delegated decision-making authority is being exercised in the manner they planned. When problems develop, bishops must motivate those working under their direction. They must correct those who are not following the policy guidelines. They must continually be concerned about the training and development of those who are working under their direction. When problems arise that are beyond the scope of decision-making authority delegated to an individual, they must consider the problems and make a decision that will

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allow that person to accomplish the task given to him.

Written reports from deacons, ministers, and others working in specific programs under the direction of the bishops can be a great help to the bishops in their administrative work. If all the reports are given orally when the bishops are at the church building attending the services of the church, the bishops will find that their administrative duties leave them little time for worship or attending Bible classes. They will have little time to visit with the members or greet the newcomers. There are just too many other important things that need to be done at the regular services of the church to take up this time with a lot of informal oral reports. If deacons, ministers, and others working under the direction of the bishops will prepare written reports whenever possible, they can prepare those reports when they have some spare time and the bishops can study them when they have some spare time. Most congregations could greatly improve their organizational efficiency if they would use written reports more than they do.

Bishops generally need to set aside at least some of their regular meeting time for their administrative function. Sometimes the best way to conduct an elders meeting is to start with the administrative function as bishops. Spend some time meeting with deacons, ministers, and others discussing specific programs. Schedule reports from these people on a regular basis as the first item of business in elders meetings. After that report session is finished, the eldership can then move into its decision-making function. When that work is done, the eldership can then consider the spiritual needs of individual members and talk about the work they need to do as spiritual teachers and counselors.

In addition to regular meetings in which specific programs are reviewed, bishops need to meet with individual deacons and ministers regularly to discuss their work in general. Any deacon who seems to have a good potential for becoming a bishop some day should have at least an annual meeting with the bishops in which they focus on his personal, spiritual, intellectual, and leadership growth. It is impossible for ministers to function effectively without a regular review of this nature that lets them know where they

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stand, how the bishops feel about their work, and what the bishops expect for the future.

Generally it is not necessary for all of the deacons to meet with the bishops—although a few such elder-deacon meetings each year are useful. It is, however, a good idea to have each deacon scheduled for a meeting with the elders as often as needed. Some deacons might be working in programs which call for them to meet with the bishops every month. Others might need only one meeting every quarter or perhaps just two a year. The requirements of the particular program should determine the frequency of attendance by a deacon at the elders meeting.

It is generally a good idea to have the ministers present for at least a part of almost every elders meeting. The relationship between ministers and bishops should be such that the bishops would like to have the ministers present throughout the entire course of almost every elders meeting. The pulpit minister, particularly, is so important in the life of a congregation that he needs to be directly involved almost all the time. Ministers can attend elders meetings and offer their suggestions without casting a vote. A preacher must not try to dominate such an elders meeting. The way he acts and the way the bishops act must create the right atmosphere or else it will do no good for him to be present in these meetings. The pulpit minister plays such an important role in the life of the congregation that some have called him the “quarterback” of the team. This may be the kind of team in which the coach calls the plays from the sidelines rather than having the quarterback call the plays himself. But it does seem most unusual that many congregations expect their pulpit minister to be the quarterback and yet they never even let him in the huddle! Most programs of church work need a push from the pulpit to keep them moving. A preacher can provide that push much more effectively if he is allowed to sit in on the elders meetings so that he can know what is going on.

It is not necessary for the bishops to do all the administrative work themselves. If they are actively involved in supervising the most important things, they can safely turn over much of the day-to-day administrative work to deacons

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or ministers. What often happens in small congregations is that the elders function only as a decision-making body and leave all the administrative work to the preacher. What often happens in large congregations is that the bishops try to do all the day-to-day administrative work themselves and do not use their ministers and the church office staff enough in this function. One alternative that some congregations have found to be effective is to have the church provide financial support so that one of the bishops can devote his full time to the day-to-day administrative work. The key is for all the bishops to be actively involved in administering the most important matters and to use a full-time paid elder, ministers, the church office staff, deacons, or others to assist them in administering at the level of the day-to-day operation of various programs. Bishops should remember the wise counsel Jethro gave to Moses and apply that principle in their work as administrators as well as in their delegation of decision-making authority.

Analyze

The administrative function of bishops does not end with the successful completion of a project. Too often we make the same mistakes over and over again because we do not learn from our own experience. When a task is finished or a project completed, bishops need to see what can be learned from the experience. They need to note what things worked and try them again. They need to note what things did not work and try to figure out what went wrong.

It is at this final stage of the administrative process that bishops need to consider structural changes that might be needed the next time a similar project comes up. What happens all too often is that problems come up in the conduct of some program—problems that are really personality problems. The bishops ought to deal with these personality problems when they arise. But what many bishops do is to make structural changes in the organization as a way of bypassing personality problems. Good leaders avoid making policy decisions to correct personality problems. All too often those policy decisions live on long after the personality

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problems that produced them have departed. It may not be pleasant to get two deacons together and bring their personality clash out into the open and help them correct it. But in the long run, that is a lot better than creating some awkward organizational structure simply as a way of getting around those personality problems.

Analyzing, the final step in the administrative process, is the time for bishops to reflect on the aims, goals, and objectives that they pictured at the beginning of this process. They need to make sure that their vision is what God would have it to be and that their challenge to the congregation keeps pace with the ever growing spiritual needs of the members.

If bishops will visualize, organize, deputize, supervise, and analyze—they will function effectively and efficiently as administrators and that will leave them more time for their most important but most neglected work—their function as spiritual counselors and teachers in their role as pastors or shepherds.

Chapter

7

THE SPIRITUAL COUNSELING AND TEACHING FUNCTION OF PASTORS (SHEPHERDS)

In most denominations today, it is the ministers or preachers who are called *pastors*. In the New Testament, however, it was the leaders who were called *elders* or *presbyters* and *bishops* or *overseers* who were called *pastors* or *shepherds*. The Latin word *pastor* and the Anglo-Saxon word *shepherd* both translate the word *poimen* which was used in the Greek language of the New Testament. When Paul addressed the elders (presbyters) of the church of Ephesus (Acts 20:17), he told them to take heed unto themselves and to all the *flock* (notice the figure of speech) in which the Holy Spirit had made them bishop (overseers). Then he told these men to *shepherd* the church (Acts 20:28). In I Pet. 5:1-4, Peter told the elders or bishops of the church to *shepherd* the flock of God. In both of these passages, the Greek word is *poimeno*, which is simply the verb form for *shepherd*.

Eph. 4:11 says that in addition to apostles, prophets, and evangelists, God gave some to be "pastors and teachers." The apostles and prophets established the church and wrote the books of the New Testament. The work of the apostles and prophets was done in the first century. Evangelists were to preach the message recorded by the apostles and prophets throughout the Christian age. There were also to be pastors or shepherds teaching the church throughout the Christian age. Their function was "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of

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doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph. 4:12-16).

Long before the New Testament was written, the relationship between the shepherd and his flock had become a figure of speech describing the function of spiritual counselors and teachers among God's people. Ezek. 34:1-31 condemned the spiritual counselors and teachers of Israel because they had not done for God's people what faithful shepherds were supposed to do for their flocks. "Shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves: should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them" (Ezek. 34:3-4).

In Bible times, shepherds lived with their flocks. Lk. 2:8 says "And in that region there were shepherds out in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night." Shepherds defended their flocks from wild animals (I Sam. 17:34-37). In Psa. 23:1-6, God's care for His people is compared to that of the shepherds who led their flocks, provided for them, and protected them. The New Testament uses the figure of the shepherd to describe the ministry of Jesus Christ. In I Pet. 5:4, Jesus is called "the Chief Shepherd." In John 10:1-18, Jesus calls himself "the good shepherd." He is not like the hired servants who flee in the face of danger. He loves the sheep so much that He lays down His life for the sheep. And the sheep follow Him because they know His voice.

This figurative use of the word *shepherd* is the sense in which it was applied to leaders of the New Testament congregations. In their function as pastors or shepherds, they were to guard the church, admonish the Christians, and deal with the erring who refuse to repent.

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Guarding the Church

In Acts 20:28-31, Paul told the elders of the congregation in Ephesus, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears." The function of guarding against the danger of false teachers is further emphasized in Titus 1:9-11, where we read that to be qualified to serve as an elder, a man must "hold fast the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it. For there are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially the circumcision party; they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for base gain what they have no right to teach."

In order to guard the congregation from the danger of false teachers, shepherds must know the word of God and know how to teach it. I Tim. 3:2 says that a bishop must be "apt to teach." Unfortunately, some elders in the church today are apt to teach almost anything. Many are not able to recognize false doctrine when they hear it. Many others can recognize false doctrine but do not know enough about the Bible to refute it. One of the main reasons that some preachers are taking over the leadership role the Bible assigns to the elders is that the preacher, the members of the congregation, and the elders themselves know that the preacher knows far more about the Bible than the elders do. The shepherds of God's church need to spend much more time studying the Bible.

Another thing that is needed if shepherds are to guard the church from the danger of false teachers is for those shepherds to know what is going on in the congregation and in the brotherhood. Acts 20:31 commands shepherds to watch. The Greek word in this passage is *gregoreo*, which

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literally means to be alert. There are those who have no interest in what is going on outside their own local congregation. They do not care about the brotherhood as they should (I Pet. 2:17). Their only reaction to the brotherhood is to complain about what they call "brotherhood politics" or "brotherhood pressure." But Paul specifically warned Titus about the danger of those who belong to the "circumcision party" (Titus 1:10). Paul specifically warned Timothy about Hymenaeus and Alexander (I Tim. 1:20). He felt that Timothy should know that Demas had forsaken him "having loved this present world" (II Tim. 4:10). The Holy Spirit guided Jude to warn about false doctrines that were troubling the church in his day (Jude 3-16). Rom. 16:17 says "Mark those who are causing divisions and difficulties contrary to the doctrine which you have been taught and avoid them." (The word for mark in the original Greek text is *skopeo*, which means to watch or look at. When people are causing trouble in the church by their evil lives or their false doctrines, shepherds need to know about it and guard against the danger.

The shepherds or pastors of the Lord's church need to stay informed about brotherhood issues so that they will know what false doctrines to guard against. They need to read brotherhood papers and attend lectureships, workshops, and other similar meetings. They should never hire a preacher without first checking with the elders of other congregations where he has served. Some preachers who have split congregation after congregation with their false doctrines still find places to preach simply because of shepherds who do not stay informed about what is going on in the brotherhood. Many congregations have welcomed some new member and given him a class to teach or put him in some position of leadership without even checking with the elders of the congregation he came from in order to see if he is a faithful Christian. Congregations have often been divided simply because of shepherds who were not watchful enough to know what was going on in the brotherhood.

The watchfulness of a congregation's shepherds, however, is not limited to an external brotherhood view. Heb. 13:17 says that they watch for the souls of the individual

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members of the congregation. The word for *watch* in this passage is *agrupneo* in the original Greek text. This word literally means to stay awake. However, the word came to mean watchfulness and not just wakefulness. This is the watchfulness of those who do not sleep on guard duty. Shepherds must watch for the spiritual welfare of each sheep in God's flock.

Unfortunately, many elderships do not have any records system set up to keep an individual attendance record on each member. Most congregations keep a record to the total number in attendance at each service, but that record does not tell the percentage of members who were in attendance. Having a high percentage of members in attendance at each service and thus having a low level of absenteeism is more important in the long run than having a large total attendance figure. You cannot know the level of absenteeism without individual attendance records. What is even more important, you cannot identify individual attendance problems without individual attendance records. It is relatively easy to keep an individual attendance record book in classes. Congregations of 500 members or less can usually keep an accurate individual attendance record with a name tag peg board. Larger congregations usually have to ask all the members as well as the visitors to fill out attendance cards. Each Monday morning, a church secretary, zone leader, or someone needs to call the members who did not attend to see if there is some problem. An individual attendance record book should be kept in the church office. A form which I have often used has one page for each member and all the services of the church for an entire year are listed on that one page. Having such an individual attendance record book available for the elders can be a great help to them in their counseling with individual members. Those who keep such records need to have a system developed for letting the elders know whenever a member has missed services for a certain period of time. At the end of each year, it is a good idea for the elders to send out "report cards" in which they note how many services each member attended and how many services that member missed—along with some appropriate words of praise or correction. When a congregation does not

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have an individual attendance record system, what happens all too often is that some member starts missing a few services and then a few more and finally does not attend at all—but it may take several weeks or months for the elders to miss the person. By then it is often too late to correct the problem.

The church is supposed to withdraw its fellowship from members who are covetous (I Cor. 5:10). However, most elderships have no way of knowing which members are covetous and which members are not. Most members of the church and many elders feel that it is none of the elder's business how much a member of the church makes or how much he gives. But if the shepherds of the church do not know these things, how can they guard against the danger of covetousness? Elders ought to develop the kind of relationship with the members so that they would feel free to discuss the level of giving that would be appropriate for each family.

In congregations where the elders do not visit often in the homes of the members and where there are no elder-member conferences on a regular basis, the elders generally know nothing about the personal lives and the family relationships of the members. Sometimes the first that the elders know of some trouble is when they read in the local newspaper about a family in their congregation that is getting a divorce. At that point they may go to those members to admonish them, but by then it is usually too late to do much good.

The pastors or shepherds of God's church must find some way to keep in close personal contact with each member of the congregation so that they will know at once when problems arise. If they do not, they cannot really function as shepherds. One of the greatest problems in the church today is that too many elderships function only as a decision-making body for the congregation and do not even try to function in the area of spiritual counseling and teaching. If any counseling is done at all it is done by the preachers.

Admonishing the Christians

I Thess. 5:12 speaks of "those who are over you in the Lord" and this passage says that one of the things these

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leaders must do is to “admonish” the Christians. The word in the original Greek text is *noutheteo*, which means “to put in mind.” *Nouthesia*, the noun form, means “training by word”—whether by word of encouragement, or, if necessary, by word of reproof. Eph. 6:4 says that we are to “teach and admonish” one another. To teach is to impart a knowledge of God’s word. To admonish is to encourage people to apply that word to their lives and to correct them when they fail to apply God’s word to their lives.

The pastors or shepherds of God’s church cannot fulfil their responsibility to admonish the members of the congregation simply by arranging to have pulpit preaching and classroom teaching. These efforts are important and the bishops should supervise them carefully. But individual counseling is also required.

Most elders and many preachers have been intimidated by the claims of professional counselors—most of whom are not Christians and many of whom are clearly anti-Christian. Many psychiatrists agree with Freud that religion is the greatest enemy of mankind. They try to correct the problems caused by guilt feelings by persuading people that there is no God and therefore no guilt. I have seen many fine families broken by divorce and many lives ruined simply because people went to a professional counselor who taught them anti-Christian doctrines.

I am not suggesting that there is no place for professional counseling. There is. Professional counselors are often needed. Many mental or emotional problems are caused by physical problems which demand the care of someone with professional training in that area. There are other mental or emotional problems that are learned. Some of these are very deep-seated problems that demand the attention of a person with professional training. Some of these problems are not spiritual at all. Other problems are caused by a breakdown of interpersonal communication and demand the attention of a person with professional training in that area.

There are some clear differences between spiritual problems which call for counseling by the shepherds of the church and other problems which call for professional counseling. But there is also a big area of overlap between

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the two. The shepherds of God's church must know His word and must also know the members of the congregation well enough to recognize problems that are caused by sin. When Christians are having mental or emotional problems caused by sin, the shepherds of the church must admonish them to repent. They must teach them the word of God so that these Christians will know what they ought to do. They must encourage and exhort these Christians to do what they know they ought to do. They must reprove and rebuke these Christians when they refuse to do what they know they ought to do. If these Christians do what their shepherds urge them to do and the mental or emotional problems remain, that is a good indication that the problems are more deep-seated and that professional counseling is needed. But shepherds of the Lord's church should not just send Christians to *any* professional counselor. They should know the professional counselors of their area well enough to know which ones to avoid. It is not always necessary that the professional counselor be a Christian, but at least he must not be anti-Christian. He must use an approach which respects the religious value system of his clients. Whenever possible, of course, the best solution is to send Christians with deep-seated problems to professional counselors who are faithful Christians.

The church needs more Christian Counseling Centers in which faithful Christians who are professionally trained as psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, marriage and family counselors, social workers, communication counselors, etc., can provide the help that is needed as a back-up to the spiritual counseling done by the shepherds of local congregations. Such centers could offer a valuable in-service training program to help elders, preachers, and others learn more about how to do the level of counseling in which they should be involved. Large congregations need to hire full-time ministers who are professionally trained to assist the shepherds in their spiritual counseling work. More Christian colleges need to offer degree programs in counseling and strengthen the programs already in existence.

Rom. 15:14 says "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled

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with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.” In the *Christian Counselor’s New Testament*, Jay Adams translates this last phrase “competent to counsel one another.” If a man is qualified to serve as an elder-bishop-pastor of the Lord’s church, he is competent to counsel Christians who are having spiritual problems. Most mental or emotional problems are caused by sin. The leaders of the Lord’s church ought to know how to recognize sin and teach people what to do to correct the problems caused by sin.

The main reason that the churches of Christ are not growing today the way we can and should be growing is that our drop-out rate is far too high. One of the main reasons for our high drop-out rate is that elderships are functioning only as a decision-making body and neglecting their function as spiritual counselors and teachers. Some preachers are doing what they can to help in this area, but many preachers have been told that they are not supposed to be counselors. But regardless of what a man was told when he was being trained for the ministry, as soon as he starts doing full-time local work he will have many people who come to him with all sorts of problems that demand Christian counseling. He cannot be a faithful minister if he refuses to help people with these problems. The main problem, however, is not with preachers who refuse to get involved in spiritual counseling and teaching, but with elders who neglect this work and therefore are shepherds in name only.

Dealing With the Erring Who Refuse to Repent

The mental or emotional problems that bring Christians to the point where they need Christian counseling—and perhaps even professional counseling—are most often caused by sin. The common element in all sin is rebellion against the authority of God. Jas. 2:10,11 says “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ said also, ‘Do not kill.’ If you do not commit adultery, but you do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law.” This passage does not teach that you have to be perfect in order to be saved, but it does teach that there are many way to rebel against the

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authority of God. You must reject the authority of God over your life in order to kill just as you must reject the authority of God over your life in order to commit adultery.

There are many ways to reject the authority of God. Jas. 4:17 says, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." I Jn. 3:4 tells us that everyone who commits sin transgresses the law "for sin is the transgression of the law." I Jn. 5:17 says "all wrongdoing is sin." Anything that we do in violation of our conscience is sin. In discussing the question of whether or not to eat meat, Paul said in Rom. 14:23, "But he who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatsoever does not proceed from faith is sin." But in all of these different kinds of sin, the one essential element is rebellion against the authority of God.

Have you ever said "I know that I ought to, but I don't want to"? The personal pronoun *I* is used in three different ways in that sentence. There is the logical, rational, reasonable mind that knows. There is the conscience that tells you what you ought to do or ought not to do. And there is the emotional nature that tells you what you want to do or do not want to do. The word of God becomes a part of the conscience of a Christian. Conflicts sometimes arise between what God tells that Christian to do and what that Christian's emotional nature wants to do. What happens when Christians rebel against the authority of God is that they let the emotional nature take control. Around the turn of the century, there was a well-known American writer who was an alcoholic. The doctors told him that if he did not stop drinking, he would be dead within six months. So he went on the "water wagon" for a few weeks. But then one day he went into his favorite bar and said, "I have decided that I will no longer be a slave to my will power." He got drunk and stayed drunk until he died. It is evident that the lower emotional nature had taken over and was speaking when he said, "I will no longer be a slave to my will power."

One of the most important things that shepherds of the Lord's church need to keep in mind as they are counseling Christians who sin is that the basic problem is that they are doing what they want to do instead of doing what they know

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they ought to do. What they must be told is "Let your decisions control your actions and your actions will control your feelings." They must decide to obey God, whether they want to or not. Once this part of their personality takes over and their decisions are controlling their actions, their feelings will gradually change. They will eventually be able to turn their duties into desires. It does not do any good and often does much harm to approach erring Christians with a strong emotional appeal. Their problem is not that they are controlled by the wrong feelings. Their problem is that they are controlled by their feelings rather than letting their decisions control their actions. It does little good to appeal to their feelings of guilt and fear. They have already demonstrated that their feelings which have led them to sin are stronger than their feelings of guilt and fear. The task must be to shift control away from the feeling part of the personality. Once they are letting their decisions control their actions, then emotional appeal can be useful—but then what is needed is inspiration and encouragement rather than guilt and fear appeals.

There are times, however, when Christians continue in rebellion against the authority of God no matter how they are admonished. That is when the shepherds of the church must lead in discipline. One of the major reasons for the present weakness of the church is that we have generally refused to practice what the Bible teaches about discipline.

The Bible is very clear in teaching how we are to deal with Christians who rebel against the authority of God and refuse to repent in spite of repeated admonitions. In Mat. 18:15-17, Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile or a Publican." The Jews of that time had nothing at all to do with Gentiles or Publicans—so what Jesus was saying is that you should not have anything to do with a Christian who refuses to repent of his rebellion in spite of such repeated admonitions.

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In Rom. 16:17-18, Paul wrote, "I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded."

The most detailed Bible discussion of this matter is found in I Cor. 5:1-13. A member of the Lord's church in Corinth was guilty of sexual immorality and refused to repent. Notice that Paul said, "Let him who has done this be removed from among you" (I Cor. 5:2). In I Cor. 5:6, Paul warned, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump," and then in I Cor. 5:8, Paul said, "Purge out the old leaven." In I Cor. 5:9-13, Paul said, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men, not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber, not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?" Then Paul concludes his inspired counsel to the Corinthian congregation concerning the immoral member by saying, "Drive out the wicked person from among you."

There are many other passages of Scripture which deal with how we relate to the erring. Gal. 1:6-9 says that we must regard false teachers as being accursed. II Thess. 3:6, says, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us." Then in II Thess. 3:14-15, Paul said, "If any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother." I Tim. 5:20 says, "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear." Titus 3:10-11 says "As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted

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and sinful; he is self-condemned." II John :9-11 says "Who-soever goes beyond and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. He who abides in the teaching, the same has both the Father and the Son. If any one comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house and do not give him greeting: for he who gives him greeting partakes of his evil works."

When a Christian sins deliberately and continually and refuses to repent in spite of repeated admonitions, the congregation must formally and publically withdraw from that individual the fellowship of the church. If a person has been withdrawn from, you must not associate with him in such a way as to suggest that you approve of what he has done. If a Christian has fallen away from the Lord and you continue ordinary social relations with that person rather than taking every opportunity to exhort him to repent, your continued association would suggest approval of what he has done.

There are three main reasons for this drastic surgery—this amputation. The first and most important reason, as suggested in I Cor. 5:6, is to protect the church from the evil influence of such people. A second very important reason is to protect the influence of the church in the community so that the work of leading others who are lost to Jesus Christ might not be hindered by the evil influences of such an individual in the congregation. A third reason, as suggested in II Thess. 3:14, is to shame the sinner in the hope that this will bring him to repentance. But even if all the members of the congregation were fully persuaded that a particular individual would not repent, and indeed, would become even more rebellious if withdrawn from—even then this action must still be taken in order to protect the church from his evil influence and in order to protect the influence of the church in the community. If a congregation does not withdraw fellowship from fallen Christians who refuse to repent of their rebellion against God, that congregation is refusing to obey a very clear command of God's word.

The Bible mentions several specific sins in various examples of people who needed to be withdrawn from. But the Bible does not give us a list of specific sins that are

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grounds for being disfellowshipped. Remember that the essence of all sin is rebellion against the authority of God. Actually there is only one reason for being disfellowshipped and that is a refusal to repent—regardless of what specific sin might be involved. It does not make any difference what specific sin you might be talking about, if a Christian deliberately and continually sins and refuses to repent in spite of everything that can be done to bring that person to repentance—God’s people must expell that individual from their fellowship.

Sometimes this drastic action will bring the sinner to repentance—but not always. Some erring Christians have gone so far in their rebellion against God that they have hardened their hearts against His word. When they cross that point of no return, there is no more hope. Even if they lived for 1,000 years, they would never be able to repent because they have hardened their hearts against the only power that can bring them to repentance. Heb. 6:4-6 says, “For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.” Some people become so hardened in their rebellion that they cannot repent and without repentance there is no hope of salvation.

The time in which sinners can get right with God is much more limited than many people have supposed. It is not just that death might come or the Lord might return before the sinner repents. The opportunity for repentance is much more limited than that. There are a very few precious moments in life when the heart of the sinner is touched by the word of God. In those moments, the sinner can make the right decision and obey God. But if the sinner continues in his rebellion or just puts off his obedience, that very action hardens his heart. The next time he hears the word of God, it will be just that much harder to obey and just that much easier to put off obedience and thus to continue in rebellion. After a time, the conscience of the sinner is like skin that has been seared with a hot iron (I Tim, 4:2)—like scar tissue or like a callous that is past feeling (Eph. 4:19). II Cor. 7:10 says

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that a godly sorrow produces repentance. But people who rebel against God can very quickly lose the power to feel a godly sorrow. That is why it is so very important for the shepherds of the Lord's church to reach erring Christians as soon as possible before they have become hardened in their rebellion and can no longer be moved to repentance by the word of God. That is why II Pet. 2:20-22 says "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, the dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow that is washed only to wallow in the mire." Those who have not yet heard the word of God can still be influenced by its power. Those who are hardened in rebellion can no longer be reached by its power. For that reason they can no longer repent and therefore there is no hope at all for them. Shepherds of God's flock must sometimes leave the 99 who are faithful in order to seek the one that is lost. Time is very important in such rescue efforts. There must be no delay.

It is very difficult to begin the practice of withdrawing fellowship from Christians who refuse to repent of their rebellion in a congregation that has neglected this practice for many years. Changing the practice on this matter cannot be done effectively without extensive preparation. It will do more harm than good to start withdrawing fellowship from Christians who rebel without first getting the elders involved in counseling. As long as elderships function only as decision-making bodies, church discipline will be useless. The first thing that must happen, therefore, is for elders to decide to become shepherds. The next thing that must happen is for the congregation to be taught the word of God on this subject of discipline. After that, the shepherds must spend a long period of time counseling the erring Christians. They must do everything in their power to get these erring Christians involved in the activities and the fellowship of

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the congregation. In many cases, there is no real fellowship to withdraw from these erring Christians. If a congregation really made an effort to extend fellowship to these erring Christians in an effort to bring them to repentance, the fellowship would not have to be withdrawn from most of them because most of them would repent.

If the elders of a congregation, acting in their role as shepherds, have done everything in their power to bring an erring Christian to repentance and that individual refuses to repent, the congregation must withdraw its fellowship from that individual. The elders should remind the congregation about the Scriptures requiring a withdrawal of fellowship. They should review the Scriptures dealing with the particular sin that is involved. They should review the facts of the case enough so that the congregation will know that the individual in question has violated God's law. They should review the history of the case enough so that the congregation will know that every possible effort has been made to bring the individual to repentance. All of this can and should be done in such a way as to insure that the congregation will not be subject to a law suit on the charge of slander.

There are situations in which the elders might decide that no delay is possible and that the withdrawal of fellowship must be done at once. It is not essential that the entire congregation have a period of time in which individual members can try to persuade the erring Christian to repent. When the elders of the church went to that individual urging him to repent, they went in the name of the church. The congregation as a whole acted through its eldership. Mat. 18:17 says "Tell it to the church and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile or a Publican." Some have taken this to mean that there *must* be a waiting period between the first announcement to the congregation and the time when the withdrawal of fellowship becomes final. But when an individual who was wronged told the elders and they tried to persuade the erring member to repent, that fulfilled the requirement to "tell it to the church." And when the erring member refused to listen to the elders who went to him in the name of the church, he refused to listen "even to the church."

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As a general rule there is nothing to be lost and much to be gained by having a delay between the original announcement to the congregation and the final withdrawal of fellowship. If there is no pressing need for immediate action, the elders should explain the situation to the congregation as outlined above. They should ask the members to make one final effort to persuade the erring member to repent. They should ask the members to pray that the erring Christian will come to repentance. But then they should explain that if the erring member does not repent by a certain time—perhaps within one or two weeks—they will have to ask the congregation to withdraw its fellowship from that individual. If this period of time passes without the individual repenting, then they should review the matters briefly and solemnly ask the congregation to join with them in withdrawing fellowship from the erring member. At that point, it would be appropriate for the elders to review the teaching of the Scriptures about how Christians are to treat those who have been disfellowshipped. It should be made clear that they are not to treat him as an enemy. They are to continue trying to admonish him whenever they have the opportunity. But until that individual repents, the members of the congregation must have nothing more to do with him.

Church discipline is not effective if a member who is withdrawn from can simply transfer membership to another congregation and be accepted into full fellowship. For that reason, when a congregation finds it necessary to withdraw fellowship from a member who rebels against the authority of God and who refuses to repent, the elders of that congregation should notify all other congregations in the area. Furthermore, they should not remove that member from their files as though their responsibility had ended. They should try to keep in touch with the erring member. If he ever moves to another city, they should let the elders of the congregations in that city know that this brother has been disfellowshipped.

A similar procedure in regard to church files should be followed with all members who move away. No member should be dropped from the church files until he has placed membership with another congregation. If a member moves

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to another city, before he moves the elders should talk to him about the importance of finding another church home and placing membership as soon as possible. They might remove his name from the church directory as soon as he moves, but they should keep him in their files until they hear that he has placed membership elsewhere. If they do not hear from that member telling them that he has placed membership, they should write to him and urge him to find a congregation where he can get to work for the Lord. They should write to faithful congregations in the area and ask them to contact the member. There are far too many "members at large" in the churches of Christ. A religious census in most cities would find that there are usually as many Christians who are not members of any local congregation as there are on the church rolls of all the congregations in the city. Those "members at large" used to be faithful Christians. They dropped out of the church when they moved. Now no eldership is responsible for them. What should have happened is that the congregation they left kept in touch with them and kept doing what it could to persuade them to place membership elsewhere. In addition to those listed in the membership directory, a congregation should maintain an "inactive file" for members who have not yet placed membership elsewhere. Death and a transfer of membership should be the only reasons for totally removing a name from the church files and thus from some recognition of responsibility by an eldership.

Elders must recognize that they are more than a decision-making body for the congregation. They are also bishops and pastors. As elders, they must learn to be more efficient decision-makers. As bishops, they must learn to be more effective administrators. If they will do these things, they will have the time that it takes to function as spiritual counselors and teachers. If they will focus as much of their time and energy as possible on this most important but most neglected role as the shepherds of the church, the drop-out rate in the church will be reduced and the church will begin to grow once again the way it can and should grow.

Chapter

8

DEVELOPING QUALIFIED LEADERSHIP

The storage of qualified leaders is probably the greatest single barrier to growth in the churches of Christ today. In the long run, no congregation can outgrow its leadership. In this chapter we will consider qualifications for church leadership with the primary emphasis on the qualifications of elders. Then we will consider things that can be done to develop qualified leadership.

Qualifications to Consider

All too often congregations do nothing to develop leadership until, one by one, all the elders have died or moved away. The congregation is then suddenly faced with the task of finding new elders. If a congregation waits until such a crisis arises before it starts trying to develop qualified leaders, it has already waited far too long. Men do not become qualified for the eldership overnight. It takes years of careful preparation. When faced with the task of finding new elders, many congregations take a very shallow approach. As various men of the congregation are considered, many members of the church ask only two questions: "How old is he?" and "How many children does he have?" It takes no special talent to have children and grow old. These are not the most important matters to consider. Perhaps the reason that so many focus on these two questions is that age and the number of children are two things that are easy to count. The really important qualifications demand more careful consideration. Age and the number of children are not important factors to consider. But since this is where so many people start, we need to get these matters out of the way so that we can move on to a consideration of the really important things.

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The Bible does not say how old a man must be to serve as an elder. Even if the word *elder* had been used in the Bible in the sense of the first definition of “older” when talking about this office, that would not tell us much. The word *older* is a relative term. Anyone 29 years of age is already in the older half of the total population. Anyone 36 years old is already in the older half of the life expectancy range. Anyone who is 42 years old is already in the older half of the adult population. Furthermore, when talking about this office, the Bible does not use the word *elder* to mean “older.” A secondary definition was clearly the intended meaning and the reference was to a decision-making function, not to age. Of course, by the time a man meets the other qualifications, he will be in the older part of the population. But age within itself is not a Biblical qualification for this office.

The debate over how many children a man must have to be qualified for the eldership is based on how the word *children* is used in two passages listing qualification for the eldership. I Tim. 3:4 says “having his children in subjection.” Titus 1:6 says “having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.” It is argued by some that the word *children* is plural and therefore must mean “two or more.” Others claim that the word *children* is generic and means “one or more.” There are other Scriptures in which the word *children* is used in the generic sense. In Gen. 21:7, Sarah said “Who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should give children suck? For I have borne him a son in his old age.” Note that Sarah had only one son and yet she used the word *children*. In Gen. 30:1, Rachel said to Jacob, “Give me children or I die.” The intended meaning in this passage was obviously “one or more.” In several passages of Scripture, we read of people dying without having had children (I Chron. 2:30,32; Isa. 23:4; Luke 20:29). The obvious meaning in these passages is “one or more.” If these people had only one child each, none of them would have died “without children.” Those who had to forsake children for the cause of Christ are to be rewarded according to Mat. 19:29 and Mark 10:29. Surely this reward includes the person who had to forsake only one child for the cause of Christ and is not limited to those who had to forsake two or more children. I Tim. 5:4

says that any widow who has children should be cared for by her children so that the church might not be burdened and thus might be in a better position to care for those widows who have no children. Surely this applies to the widow who has only one child and is not limited to those who have two or more children. But perhaps the most convincing evidence that “one or more” is the intended meaning is found in Titus 1:6. The passage says “having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.” How many riotous or unruly children would it take to disqualify a man from serving as an elder? Surely we can all agree that one or more riotous or unruly sons or daughters would disqualify a man from serving in the eldership. How then could anyone argue that “faithful children” means “two or more” while “children not accused of riot or unruly” means “one or more”? The word *children* is used only once in this passage. As a matter of judgment, some have argued that a man who has brought up two or more children has had some experience in settling conflicts that a man who has brought up only one child has not had and that experience might be useful in the eldership. However, it can also be argued that a man who has brought up an only child without that child being spoiled has had an experience that a man with two or more children has not had and that experience might be just as useful in the eldership. The number of children a man has is not a Biblical qualification. What is important is the quality of his relationship with the children he has.

***The Outline of Qualification in I Tim. 3:1-13
and Titus 1:5-9***

These two familiar passages of Scripture present the most detailed list of qualifications. These qualification, however, are not unique to the eldership. Almost all of these qualifications are discussed in other passages of Scripture as requirements for all Christians. In general, what is pictured in these passages is a model of a mature Christian man. Many of these qualifications involve questions of degree. No one is perfect in holiness, patience, or self-control. There is always room for improvement. Those qualifications that

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involve questions of degree simply point out the areas that must be considered. Furthermore, these things are not just qualifications that congregations need to consider as they select men for the eldership. Many of these things are qualities that elders need to apply in their practice of leadership after they are selected.

Desire

I Tim. 3:1 says "If a man desires overseership, he desires a good work." The original Greek text uses two words for "desire" in this passage. *Epithumeo* means to earnestly and eagerly desire. *Orego* means to stretch forward toward, long for, or seek. Every Christian should desire to serve the cause of Christ in whatever way he can. Some recognize that they do not have the leadership abilities required in this office and therefore seek to serve the Lord in other ways. If a man feels that he has the leadership abilities required in this office, it is proper for him to desire to serve as an elder. There is a sense, however, in which the office should seek the man rather than the man seeking the office. A man should not campaign for this office as he might for some office in the secular world. If a man wants to serve some day in the eldership, what he should seek is to develop the necessary qualifications. He should then seek to serve the Lord in whatever way he can. In that way, he will be prepared if and when a congregation needs him in the eldership.

Some do not regard desire as a necessary qualification for the eldership. But if a man is qualified in every other way and does not desire to serve in the eldership, then something is wrong spiritually since he does not desire to serve the Lord in whatever way he can. Sometimes what happens is that a man is qualified in every other way, but does not recognize his own leadership potential. In such a case, others need to encourage him and help him see his potential for service in this office.

Experience

I Tim. 3:6 says "not a novice, lest being puffed up he fall into the same condemnation as the devil." Greek text here

used the word *neophutos*, which literally means “newly planted.” This refers to the new convert. If a new convert is put into the eldership, the danger is that he may be lifted up with pride as the devil was and thus fall from the grace of God as the devil fell. The Bible does not tell us how long a man must be a Christian before he is no longer classified as a “new convert.” What the Bible does is to present this as an important area to consider. Some men who have been Christians for only a few years have already advanced spiritually far beyond many who have been in the church for many years. Some Christians have not really had 20 years of experience in the church. They have just had one year over experience 20 different times.

Reputation

I Tim. 3:7 says “Moreover he must have good testimony from them that are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” To be qualified for the eldership, a man must have a good reputation among the non-members of the community. I Tim. 3:2 says that he must be “blameless.” The word in the original Greek text is *anepiletos*, which literally means “cannot be laid hold of.” An elder must be above reproach. He must give no grounds for accusation. Titus 1:6 uses an even stronger word for “blameless.” This passage uses the word *anenketos*, which is not merely acquittal, but the absence of even a charge against him. Elders must be men of unquestionable integrity. If they do not have such a reputation in the community, the work of the church will be greatly hindered.

Family

Not only must an elder be above reproach, his entire family must also have such a reputation. I Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:6 makes it clear that an elder must be the husband of only one wife. In spite of the practice in some denominations, there is no way that a woman can be qualified for service in the eldership. There is no way that a man who has never married can be qualified to serve in the eldership. If a man

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has married, divorced for some cause other than adultery, and married again, there is no way that he can be qualified to serve as an elder. If a man's first wife dies and he marries again, he has only one wife and is qualified for the eldership in so far as this matter is concerned. If a man had to divorce his first wife because of her adultery and he marries again, he has only one wife. Such a situation might present some difficulties for him, but it would not disqualify him from serving in the eldership. In my judgment, a man would not have to resign from the eldership if his wife died.

I Tim. 3:11 lists several qualifications for women. Some have argued that these were qualifications for women serving in the office of "Deaconness." There were women who served the early church, but I find no Biblical evidence of that term being used in the sense of any formal office. Most regard this passage as listing qualifications for the wives of deacons. But the expression "in like manner" clearly suggests that what applies to the wives of deacons must also apply to the wives of elders. Four qualifications are listed. They must be grave, not slanderers, temperate, and faithful in all things. The Greek word for "grave" is *semnos*, which means "serious," or "worthy of respect." They must not be gossippers or false accusers. They must be self-controlled. And they must be trustworthy in all things.

I Tim. 3:4-5 says "one that rules his own house well having his children in subjection with all seriousness—for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" Titus 1:6 says "having children who believe who are not accused or riot or unruly." To be qualified for the eldership, a man must be the head of his own house. He must manage his own affairs well. His children must be under control. He must command their respect in every way and keep them respectful. His children who are old enough to be Christians must be faithful Christians and he must have at least one child who is old enough and who is a Christian. He must not have any children who are loose in morals and conduct. He must not have any children who are unruly or disorderly. His children must be above reproach in such matters.

Since these passages are talking about an elder managing

his own household, it seems to me that the conduct of adult children who have already left his household is not the subject under consideration. As a practical matter, it would create some problems for an elder to have adult children who left the church and began living wicked lives after they left his household. Such a situation, however, would not disqualify a man from appointment to the eldership or demand his resignation from the eldership. Furthermore, the birth of a child would not require that a man resign from the eldership until that child was old enough to obey the gospel, as some have suggested. What is required is that the young children be in subjection and that those who are old enough to be Christians actually be faithful Christians—preferably throughout their lives, but at least for so long a time as they are a part of that man's household. The key factor here is parental control and responsibility, not place of residence.

Teaching Ability

I Tim. 3:2 says that an elder must be “apt to teach.” The word in the original Greek text is *didaktikos*, which means “a skillful teacher.” Other English versions read “skillful in teaching,” “able to teach,” or “capable and qualified to teach.” Titus 1:9 says “holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine and to convict the gainsayers.” Elders must have a thorough knowledge of the Bible. They must be sound in doctrine. Furthermore, they must have the ability to teach others. They must know how to encourage the Christians and refute those who teach false doctrines. Related to these qualifications is the requirement of I Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:8. In the original Greek text, these verses say that an elder must be *sophron*, which literally means “of sound mind,” or “sensible.”

I Tim. 5:17 says “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of a double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching.” Evidently, in the New Testament church, some elders spent much of their time publicly preaching and teaching God's word—but others did not serve in this way. It would be Scriptural for one of the elders to serve as the preacher for a congregation and to be

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supported financially so that he could spend full time in this work (I Tim. 5:18). It is also Scriptural for a congregation to have a preacher who is not one of the elders. In this capacity Timothy worked with the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:17 cf. I Tim. 1:3) and Epaphroditus worked with the elders at Philippi (Phil. 1:1 cf. 2:25-30).

It is not essential that all elders concentrate on public preaching and teaching, but all must be qualified to teach. Many congregations today make a serious mistake in appointing men to the eldership who do not know the Bible and do not know how to teach. It is not essential that all elders be skilled in public speaking. Most of the teaching that elders do in their role as elders is private counseling rather than public preaching. However, any eldership will find itself very limited if it does not contain at least one or two men who are capable of speaking effectively to the entire congregation.

Negative Characteristics

Most of the emphasis in I Tim. 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 is on the personal characteristics of elders. Both passages list certain characteristics to avoid. Titus 1:7 says that an elder must not be "greedy of filthy lucre." This translates the Greek word *aischrokerdes*, which literally means "greedy for base gain." This refers to a strong desire for wealth and a readiness to obtain that wealth by questionable means. I Tim. 3:3 says that an elder must not be "covetous." This translates the Greek word *aphilargurous*, which literally means "free from the love of money." Not only must an elder avoid seeking money by questionable means—an elder must not be motivated by a love of money in general.

An elder must not be "given to wine" according to I Tim. 3:3 and Titus 1:7. Most English versions translate this to mean "addicted to wine or strong drink." Some, however, take a second definition which refers to the effects of strong drink and thus translate the Greek word *paroinos* as meaning "a brawler." Both should be avoided. In Bible times the strongest alcoholic beverage that was available had only 14 percent alcohol. It takes a distillation process to produce

drink with more alcohol than that and the distillation process was not even invented until the middle ages. In Bible times, when the water supply was often impure, it was the custom to mix a mild wine with the water and then drink that only at meals. Such a practice does not produce intoxication. Eph. 5:18 commands Christians not to get drunk. Any degree of intoxication is a violation of God's law, not just for elders and deacons, but for all Christians. Some have argued on the basis of I Tim. 3:3 as compared with I Tim. 3:8, that deacons can drink a little but elders should not drink at all. The truth of the matter is that no Christian should use alcoholic beverages the way they are commonly used in our culture.

I Tim. 3:3 and Titus 1:7 say that an elder must not be a "striker." This has nothing to do with labor disputes. The Greek word *plektes* means a person who is pugnacious, a fighter, a brawler, a combative person. I Tim. 3:3 says that elders must not be contentious. The Greek word here is *amachos*, which means "quarrelsome." Titus 1:7 says that an elder must not be one who is "soon angry." Here the Greek word is *orgilos*, which means "quick tempered" or "prone to anger."

One of the most important negative characteristics to consider is listed in Titus 1:7, where we read that an elder must not be "self-willed." The Greek word here is *authades*, which means "self-pleasing, dominated by self-interest, inconsiderate of others, stubborn, presumptuous, unwilling to give in to others, arrogantly asserting his own will." A person with this characteristic is like to lord it over the other elders and certainly will lord it over the church.

Positive Characteristics

It is not enough to avoid the negative characteristics. It is even more important to consider the positive characteristics. In terms of number, the Bible puts more emphasis on these positive characteristics than on all the other qualifications.

I Tim. 3:2 uses the word *nephalios* in the original Greek text. This word means "vigilant, sober-minded, temperate,

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or level-headed.” This verse also uses the word *sophron* which we have already considered under the heading of teaching ability. But in addition to the meaning of “sensible” or “of sound mind,” this word is also translated “self-controlled, temperate, discrete, and circumspect.” Another important qualification in this verse is found in the Greek word *kosmios*, which means “of good behavior, decent, modest, dignified, orderly, well behaved, and leading an orderly life.” This same verse lists another important qualification in the Greek word *philoxenos*, which means “given to hospitality, showing love for and being a friend to believers and especially to strangers and foreigners.” I Tim. 3:3 uses the Greek word *epieikes*, which means “patient, gentle, equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, considerate, peaceful, and lenient.”

Titus 1:5-9 repeats many of the positive characteristics listed in I Tim. 3:1-7. In addition, Titus 1:7 stresses that elders must see themselves as “stewards of God.” A steward recognizes that everything he has belongs to God. Stewards use their money, time, talents, and energy wisely in the service of God. Titus 1:8 says that elders must be lover of that which is good. The Greek word here is *philagathos*, which means both a lover of good men and a lover of good things. Elders must be lovers of goodness. Titus 1:8 also lists three other important positive characteristics. Elders must be “just, holy, and temperate.” *Dikaion* is the word for just and it means a person who observes the rules, one who is fair-minded, upright, and righteous. *Hosios* is the word for holy and it means a person who lives a pure life and thus is right with God. *Enkrates* is the word for temperate and it literally means “keeping himself in hand” and generally refers to self-control.

Elders lead by their example and not just by their teaching and their decision-making. It is vitally important that elders have the characteristics that need to be developed in the members of the congregation. The old “do as I say and not as I do” approach just will not work.

Before leaving this section on the qualification listed in these two familiar passages, we should consider the qualifications for deacons as listed in I Tim. 3:8-13. Tim. 3:8 uses

the Greek word *semnos*, indicating that deacons must be serious, dignified, and worthy of respect. This same verse use the word *dilogos*, which is translated "double-tongued." A deacon cannot be the kind of man who says one thing to your face and another thing behind your back. The same restriction about being addicted to wine or to filthy lucre that applies to the elders also applies to the deacons. Deacons must know the word of God and be sound in doctrine. I Tim. 3:9 says "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." The wives of deacons must meet the same qualifications as those discussed earlier in connection with the wives of elders. A deacon must have only one wife. The same restrictions applied to elders apply equally to deacons. A deacon must have children who are in subjection, the same as an elder. The only distinction here is that the Bible does not mention a requirement that a deacon have children who are Christians. If a man has children old enough to be Christians and they are not, that would disqualify him from serving in the deaconate. But a deacon could have children not old enough to be Christians and still be qualified to serve in the deaconate. An elder would need to have at least one child old enough to be a Christian. In general, deacons need to have the same qualities as elders. The primary distinction in so far as the list of qualifications in I Tim. 3:1-13 is concerned, is that a deacon could be a somewhat younger man.

Qualifications Discussed in Other Scriptures

The Bible does not say that I Tim. 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 are the only passages to consider when selecting elders. All relevant passages of Scripture should be considered. There are many other important passages that should be considered. Mat. 20:25-28 shows that elders must not be the kind of men who lord it over the church. They must have the attitude of servants. Acts 20:17-35 should also be considered. From this passage we learn that elders must be watchful. They must be the kind of men who can guard the church from the danger of false teachers. And they must be willing to exhort night and day with tears, as Paul did. Another passage to

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consider is Eph. 4:11-16. Elders must be the kind of men who are mature Christians and who can help others grow to spiritual maturity. They must be men who speak the truth in love. They must be the kind of men who help build up the body of Christ in love. I Tim. 5:17 shows that they must be the kind of men who can rule well. Heb. 13:17 demonstrates that elders must be the kind of men who will take on the responsibility of watching for the souls of the congregation. Furthermore, they must be the kind of men who will lead by their persuasion and not by lording it over the church. Jas. 5:14-18 shows that elders must be men of prayer. They must care for those who are sick both physically and spiritually. They must know how to counsel and pray with those who have sinned. And they must be men of righteousness. I Pet. 5:1-4 shows that elders must be the kind of men who shepherd the flock and take the oversight "not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God." Those who are supported financially by the church must not be serving for the sake of financial gain "but of a ready mind." And they must not be the kind of men who will lord it over the church. Instead, they must be the kind of men who will lead by their example.

Qualifications Implied in the Three Titles of this Office

The most important qualifications for many positions are those implied in the titles rather than those listed in detail. A president must know how to preside. A chairman must know how to chair a meeting. A bookkeeper must know how to keep books. In my work at the University of Tulsa, I have often been involved in writing advertisements for faculty positions. We usually list such things as the degree that we require, the experience that we required, the record of research and publishing that we require—but we usually do not say anything specifically about teaching ability. We assume that everyone knows that the main job of a teacher is to teach. Teaching ability, the most important qualification, is simply implied in the title of the position. I believe that the same thing is true with this office that the Bible calls by

three titles: elder, bishop, and pastor.

Since the word *elder* is used as a title for this office with reference to a decision-making function and not to age, a very important implied qualification is that a man be a good decision-maker. Some men who are otherwise well qualified simply do not know how to make up their minds. Some who know how to make decisions, do not know how to make good decisions. A certain degree of wisdom is clearly implied in this title. In order to avoid lording it over the church in their decision-making function, elders need to know how to communicate effectively. They must be open, receptive, good listeners. Putting men without these qualities into the eldership is a sure way to develop an eldership that lords it over the church.

Since the word *bishop* clearly implies an administrative function, a very important implied qualification is that a man have administrative leadership ability. There are two extremes to avoid in this matter. The "business manager approach" puts men into the eldership simply because of their success in the secular business world—in spite of the fact that they may be seriously lacking in regard to spiritual qualifications. The "good old boy approach" ignores administrative leadership ability entirely. What congregations ought to do is to consider the leadership ability requirement implied in the title *bishop*, but make sure that the men they select meet all the other qualifications as well.

Since the word *pastor* clearly implies a spiritual counseling and teaching function, a very important implied qualification is that a man have ability as a spiritual counselor and teacher. Congregations must consider how much men know about the Bible and how sound in doctrine they are. They must consider the teaching ability of the men they put into the eldership. They must especially consider their ability in the kind of private counseling that is so much a part of their work as shepherds.

Congregations must not put into the eldership men who are like the unfaithful shepherds of Ezek. 34:1-10. They must at all costs avoid putting into the eldership the kind of men who will not provide spiritual food for the congregation, who will not strengthen those who are diseased spiritually, who

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will not heal those who are sick spiritually, who will not bind up those whose hearts are broken, who will not bring back those who stray and seek those who are lost, but who will rule over the church with force and rigor.

Pre-Service Training

Men do not become qualified for the eldership overnight. It takes years of careful preparation. The place to begin is in early childhood. We need to set before the minds of our children the model of Christian leadership discussed earlier as qualifications for the eldership. We need to say to our young men, "this is what you should strive to become." We should provide leadership training when they are young. All too often today when some young man shows a bit of leadership ability and spiritual zeal, we try to make a preacher out of him. There is, of course, a serious preacher shortage. But the preacher shortage is not half as bad as the shortage of qualified elders and deacons in the church. At least some of these young men should be encouraged to go to a Christian college, major in some secular field that will enable them to support themselves, take all the Bible courses they can, and then return to the community and prepare for service in the eldership.

Elders need to be thinking seriously about who will be leading the church 50 years from now. They should counsel with young men who seem to have the potential to be elders some day and help them to grow. A Paul-Timothy relationship that is so useful in training for the ministry is equally useful in training for the eldership. When such a young man reaches the point where he is qualified, he should be put into the deaconate. Elders need to keep in close touch with each deacon who seems to have the potential to become an elder some day. They should check with him frequently about his study habits. They should suggest good books for him to read. They should provide leadership training classes. They should encourage these future elders to attend lectureships, workshops, and other such meetings. They should move them around through a variety of assignments so that they will be familiar with many programs of work in the congre-

gation and thus be better prepared for eventual service in the eldership. I Tim. 3:13 says "For they that have served well as deacons gain to themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

In-Service Training

Most of the qualifications for the eldership involve questions of degree. No one is ever perfect in these matters. There is always room for improvement. The trouble with many elders is that they stopped growing as soon as they were selected for the eldership. A little boy once fell out of bed. When his parents asked him what had happened, he said, "I guess I went to sleep too close to where I got in." That has happened to far too many elders.

Training for the elderships needs to go on as long as a man continues in the eldership. Elders should study the Bible diligently. They should study good books on leadership, administration, management, decision-making, counseling, teaching, persuasion, human relations, etc. They should attend lectureships, workshops, and other such meetings. They should read brotherhood publications. They should visit other congregations and concentrate on learning how other elderships function in order to find ways in which they can improve their own work.

For the past five years, since I left full-time local work in the ministry, I have been conducting a good many weekend workshops on church growth and leadership. The most successful of these have been the ones in which the elders considered the training sessions as being intended primarily for them. The least successful have been the ones in which the elders felt that they did not need any training themselves and that the training sessions were intended primarily to teach the deacons and others how to follow orders.

If a man is in the eldership and he recognizes that he is not really qualified, he should either get to work on improving his qualifications or else he should resign at once. Most elders are far more aware of their own limitations than anyone realizes. Most know that they need to improve. The material presented in this chapter has focused on things

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that congregations usually consider and other things that they need to consider when they are selecting elders. Those who are already serving as elders need to study this material with great care—but their focus should not be on qualifications for selection; rather their focus should be on developing these qualities in the work that they are doing as elders, bishops, and pastors of the Lord's church.

Chapter

9

DECISIONS FOR GROWTH

If a congregation does not yet have elders and deacons, the first thing it should do is to decide that it will select elders and deacons just as soon as possible. In a very new and very small congregation there may not be a plurality of men who meet the necessary qualifications to serve as elders and deacons. It is much better for such a congregation to continue without elders and deacons than it is to appoint men who are not qualified. In I Tim. 5:22, Paul said, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor participate in another man's sins: keep yourself pure." This statement was evidently made in connection with the appointment of men to serve as elders and deacons.

Some congregations have existed for many years without ever selecting elders and deacons. That usually happens because a preacher or some other member has found that he can dominate the congregation through whatever temporary arrangement they use in place of having elders and deacons. Such men are often unqualified for leadership themselves and they know that they could not as easily dominate the congregation once elders and deacons were selected. As pointed out in the previous chapter, most of the qualifications for elders and deacons involve questions of degree. Those who want to keep a congregation from ever having elders and deacons often interpret these qualifications to mean perfection. Thus they insure that the congregation will continue using a system which they can more easily dominate.

The Bible does not give a pattern for conducting the affairs of the congregation in that period of time before elders and deacons are appointed. That seems to suggest that such a period of time was never intended to be very long.

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The congregations of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were able to select elders and deacons within less than a year after those churches were established (Acts 14:1-23). The church in Corinth, however, evidently existed for several years before men were qualified to serve as elders. God does not approve of any congregation being disorganized. But until men are qualified to serve as elders and deacons it is better to be unorganized insofar as having elders and deacons.

Since there is no pattern for any temporary arrangement in congregations that do not yet have men qualified to serve as elders and deacons, opinion and tradition in this matter must not become a law. Some such congregations have regular meetings of all the members in order to perform the decision-making and administrative functions that are normally performed by elders. Other congregations limit such meetings to the adult males of the congregation. Some have set up a committee structure with committee chairmen doing the work that would normally be done by deacons. Some congregations, however, have set up a structure in which there is a small group of leaders who are not qualified to be elders, who are not called "elders," but who are given all the authority congregations normally delegate to an eldership. Such a substitute for the Biblical pattern should be avoided.

Any temporary arrangement that is made in congregations that do not yet have men qualified to serve as elders should carefully avoid any situation in which anyone can lord it over the church. If a congregation does not yet have men qualified to serve as elders, the congregation as a whole must find some way of conducting its affairs in a manner that is approved by a majority of the members. The danger in any other system is that it can easily become a substitute for the Biblical pattern of church organization.

Role of the Congregation in the Selection of Elders and Deacons

The Bible does not give detailed instructions on the selection of elders and deacons. There is, however, enough guidance in the Scriptures to establish some important

principles. The first time after the church was established that we read of a selection process is in Acts 6:1-6. The fact that no different method was presented in later Scriptures is strong evidence that the same process was used.

At the time of Acts 6:1-6, there were not yet any elders in the Jerusalem congregation—although there was an eldership in Jerusalem by the time of Acts 11:30. In that early period in the Jerusalem congregation, the apostles were leading the church in much the same way that elders would later function. A problem developed in regard to the care of widows. The apostles called the congregation together and discussed the problem. The apostles said that it would not be best for them to neglect their work of preaching in order to administer this program of caring for the widows. So the apostles said, “Therefore, brethren, pick out from among yourselves seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3-4). Notice that the congregation as a whole did the selecting and the apostles did the appointing. The word for “pick” in the original Greek text of Acts 6:39 is *episkeptomai*, which is also translated “look out,” or “seek out.” Acts 6:5 says that the congregation chose seven men. The Greek word for “chose” in this passage is *eklego*, which literally means to “select.” The apostles said that they would “appoint” the men the congregation selected (Acts 6:4). The Greek word here is *kathistemi*, which means to formally install or set in office. The congregation as a whole selected the seven men, then the apostles publically appointed them to serve in this program of caring for the widows. Titus 1:5 uses the same Greek word, *kathistemi*, in commanding Titus to “appoint” elders in every city.

Acts 6:1-6 makes it clear that the congregation as a whole did the selecting, but it does not tell us how they did it. In most secular organizations, the selection process usually begins with nominations and then moves to some expression of the group’s will. Just before the church was established, Acts 1:15-26 tells of the selection of Matthias to take the place of the apostle Judas. Acts 1:23 says “And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed.

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Justus, and Matthias.” *Histemi* is the Greek word here translated “put forward.” Whatever nomination and selection process was used here resulted in the choice of two men. Acts 1:24-26 says that they then prayed for the Lord to show them which one of these two men He had chosen. They then cast lots and by that means Matthias was shown to be the Lord’s choice. What happened in this case was essentially that the congregation nominated two men and the Lord selected one of them. Before there can be any selection by a congregation, there must first be some kind of nomination and then some kind of expression of the congregation’s choice. It is possible that in Acts 6:1-6, several men were nominated and then the seven who received the greatest support from the congregation were presented to the apostles to be publicly appointed.

In Acts 14:23 and II Cor. 8:19 a different Greek word, *cheirotoneo*, was used in connection with this process. Acts 14:23 says that Paul and Barnabas “appointed” elders in the churches of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. II Cor. 8:19 says that a certain brother had been “appointed” by the churches to travel with Paul in collecting the offering for the poor of Judea. The Greek word *cheirotoneo* literally meant to vote by a show of hands. The word, however, had come to mean simply to appoint, without any reference to the manner by which the person had been selected. The earlier meaning of voting by a show of hands could not logically apply in Acts 14:23, for then the election would have involved only two votes—those of Paul and Barnabas. The congregation may have selected its elders by such a vote, but what Paul and Barnabas did was to publicly appoint those selected by the congregation. There is no reason to believe that the process of selecting and appointing in Acts 14:23 was any different from that of Acts 6:1-6 or that which Paul commanded in Titus 1:5. There is no Biblical authority for preachers to select the elders and deacons. The only way we can be sure that the system we use is approved by God is to have the congregation do the selecting and then let the preacher publicly appoint those selected by the congregation.

Even if the word *cheirotoneo* in Acts 14:23 were to be

taken in its earlier meaning of “select,” that would not prove that the system followed in Acts 14:23 was different from that of Acts 6:1-6. Through their preaching and teaching, gospel ministers are to see to it that elders and deacons are selected. They “select” only through the action that they teach the congregation to take. Jn. 4:1 says that Jesus baptized more people than John baptized. But then Jn. 4:2 says that Jesus did not personally baptize anyone. His disciples did the baptizing. The language of Jn. 4:1 simply means that Jesus baptized people through the action of His disciples. In much the same way, a preacher “selects” elders and deacons—but only through the action of the congregation that has been instructed in this matter by that preacher.

The role of the congregation in selecting men who are to be added to an existing eldership or deaconate is often overlooked. In a few congregations, the elders function as a self-perpetuating board of directors. They decide who will be added to the eldership and to the deaconate. The congregation is not consulted at all. Such a system is not Scriptural. The elders who are selected in this manner do not have the consent of the congregation. Remember that the word *lord* means a ruler whose authority is totally independent of the consent of those he rules. In order to avoid lording it over the church, elders must be sure that they serve with the consent of the congregation. Any elder who is appointed without the consent of the congregation is, by definition, lording it over the church.

In some congregations, the elders decide who will be nominated and the congregation is then given an opportunity to present Scriptural objections. If no Scriptural objections are presented to the elders and sustained by them, the men they nominated are then appointed. This is only a minor improvement over the system in which the elders function totally as a self-perpetuating board. A man appointed to the eldership in this way does not really know that he has the consent of the congregation. All he knows is that no Scriptural objections to his appointment were sustained by the present eldership. Nomination is a part of the selection process and it must be the congregation and not the present eldership that selects the men who are added to the eldership and to the deaconate.

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The most common practice in the churches of Christ is for the elders to ask the congregation for nominations when additional elders and deacons are needed. Often men are nominated who are clearly unqualified. The elders know that if no one else raised a Scriptural objection, they would raise it themselves and they would sustain the objection. In such a case, there is no need to go any further. Often elders have asked for a certain number of men to be added to the eldership and to the deaconate. Many elderships use the nomination process as an expression of support from the congregation (although they almost never tell the congregation that this is what they are doing). If they want to add two more elders and four more deacons, they start with the two men who received the largest number of nominations for appointment to the eldership and the four men who received the largest number of nominations for appointment to the deaconate. They contact these men to see if they are willing to serve. If some of these men are not willing to serve, they contact men who were nominated by fewer of the members. Before presenting the nominations to the congregations, some elderships consider matters other than Scriptural qualifications. They consider how well a particular individual would fit into the present eldership or deaconate. They thus express their preference and do not limit their consideration to Scriptural objections. However, they do not give the congregation an opportunity to express its preference. They simply present a list of names to the congregation and give the members an opportunity to present Scriptural objections.

There is some justification for an eldership taking a leading role in making decisions about additions to the eldership and the deaconate. In Acts 6:1-6, the apostles—who were then performing the leadership function elders would later perform in the Jerusalem congregation—were the ones who decided that it was time to appoint a group of men to administer the program of aid to widows. It was the apostles who decided how many men were needed. But the apostles did not conduct a screening process to eliminate those they did not think would fit in. They were willing to accept anyone selected by the congregation—as long as they

met the required qualifications. Whatever nominating and selecting process was used—it was the congregation that did the selecting, not the apostles. The congregation clearly had an opportunity to express its preference and was not limited to the role of presenting Scriptural objections.

In order to avoid the problem of having elders and deacons who serve without the consent of the congregation, I would strongly urge that nominations come from the congregation. Elders should remove from consideration only those who are not Scripturally qualified and those who are not willing to serve. The entire remaining list should be presented to the congregation to see if anyone knows of any Scriptural reason why any of these men should not be appointed. If objections are raised, the elders should decide whether or not they are indeed Scriptural. If any Scriptural objections are raised and sustained, those names should be removed from the list. Once again, the entire remaining list should be presented to the congregation—but this time the congregation should be asked to express its preference. If the congregation needs two new elders and four new deacons and the final list presented to the congregation contains four who were nominated for the eldership and eight for the deaconate, the two prospective elders and the four prospective deacons who received the greatest support from the congregation would be appointed.

Some may object that this system would require some kind of election or voting that is totally contrary to our tradition in the churches of Christ. But I would argue that the preference of the congregation must be expressed in some way or else the men who serve as elders and deacons can never know for sure that they serve with the consent of the congregation. If a majority of the members of a congregation do not want a particular man to serve as an elder or a deacon, there is no way that he can be effective in his work—no matter how well qualified he may be. The Bible clearly teaches that the congregation is to select its elders and deacons. That means more than just nominating and having an opportunity to present Scriptural objections. If some object to such words as *election* and *voting*, then call it something else. But whatever it may be called, the congrega-

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tion needs more of an opportunity to express its preference in the selection of elders and deacons than what is common in most congregations. The system commonly practiced in the churches of Christ today is too close to the concept of the eldership as a self-perpetuating board.

Factors to Consider in the Selection of Elders and Deacons

In Acts 6:16, it was not the congregation but the apostles who decided the number of men who were needed to administer the program of aid to widows. It might help to create more of an open atmosphere for the elders to go to the congregation and discuss the question of size. Input from the congregation is always helpful. Ultimately, however, it is the eldership that needs to make the decision on the question of size.

The Scriptural pattern clearly calls for a plurality of elders and of deacons. As long as there are two or more in the eldership, the size is Scriptural. As a matter of judgment, however, there are some important factors to consider about size. When there are only two elders, action can often be blocked by a split vote. Action can often be delayed by the absence of just one elder. Furthermore, if just one elder dies or moves away, the eldership is destroyed. When there are three elders, action is not blocked by a split vote and action does not have to be delayed because of the absence of one elder. Even if one elder dies or moves away, the eldership can continue to function. There are, however, major disadvantages in having only three men in an eldership. When action is taken by majority vote, the one in the minority is totally isolated. Psychologically, that can be a devastating position. But when there are four men in the eldership, the situation is even worse. Action can be blocked by a tie vote and when action is taken by majority vote the one in the minority is even more isolated. Any even-numbered group has the disadvantage of a tie vote blocking action. Any group of nine or more has the disadvantage of fragmentation. For purposes of decision-making efficiency, years of research in group dynamics has demonstrated that the best group size is either five or seven.

Several writers in the church growth field have reported studies of the minimal size that is needed in a congregation's eldership, deaconate, and staff of ministers in order to achieve the best growth rate. My own survey research tends to confirm their findings. The general conclusion is that the best growth rate takes place when a congregation has a minimum of one minister, two elders, and four deacons for each 200 members. The Jerusalem congregation started with 3,000 members. Results of church growth research suggest that a congregation of that size today would need a minimum of 15 preachers, 30 elders, and 60 deacons. This church growth research has clearly indicated that organizational expansion must take place before numerical growth can be achieved. You do not wait until you have 200 additional members before you add one new minister, two new elders, and four new deacons. You expand the eldership, deaconate, and staff of ministers in order to get and hold those 200 additional members.

Five or seven are the ideal numbers for a decision-making group. If all elders had to do was to function as a decision-making body for the congregation, no eldership would ever need to expand beyond that size. But elders are also bishops and sometimes a larger eldership is needed to administer the program of work in a growing congregation. Elders and bishops are also pastors and it is in the pastoral counseling and teaching area that it is probably most important to increase the size of the eldership.

As long as a congregation has 700 members or less, there is no conflict among the ideal size requirements for decision-making, administration, and pastoral counseling. Congregation that grow beyond a membership of 700 require some compromises. It is not easy to perform the decision-making function in larger groups, but it is possible. If elderships will follow the suggestions outlined in Chapter Five, they can function efficiently in spite of a size that is larger than the ideal size of seven. What must not be compromised is the need for enough pastors to perform the vital function of spiritual counseling and teaching.

If a man is being considered for appointment to the eldership, that is really all the congregation needs to know.

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The situation is not the same, however, with the deaconate. In Acts 6:1-6, when the Jerusalem congregation selected the seven men who were to administer the program to aid widows, the congregation could make their selection with full knowledge of the specific work these men would be doing. It would be most useful in congregations today if the members could consider candidates for the deaconate with the knowledge of the specific function each man would have—at least initially. There are some men the congregation might think would be great in one work but not in another. I have known some men who were great deacons in charge of building maintenance who would not have been any good at all in charge of the educational program.

One of the most important factors that congregations need to consider in the selection of elders and deacons is the question of tenure. The general custom in the churches of Christ has been to appoint elders and deacons for a life-time tenure. Preachers have not yet generally achieved that status. It must be understood, however, that this is a question of judgment and not a matter of faith. The Bible is silent on the subject of tenure. The life-time tenure system is Scriptural, but it would be equally Scriptural for a congregation to adopt some limited tenure system. Instead of appointing elders and deacons to serve for life, congregations could appoint elders and deacons to serve for one year, or three years, or whatever might be best in the judgment of that congregation. This is certainly a matter that elders, deacons, and the entire congregation should consider.

Many deacons have been appointed to serve for life with no particular function in mind when they were appointed. Elders have often found it difficult to find the right slot for each deacon. Sometimes a deacon has served well in one assignment and then completed that assignment and the elders have found it very difficult to find another slot for him. In my judgment, it would be much better for a deacon to be appointed with a specific function in mind. When he finished that assignment or the elders felt that it was time to put someone else into that assignment, it would be proper for the elders to see if there was another slot in the organization

where he was needed. If there was no specific need for that deacon any longer, I believe that the elders ought to thank him for the good work he did and let him know that if they need him in the deaconate again, they will let the congregation know and ask the congregation's approval to put him back into the deaconate. There is no Biblical reason for the deaconate to be a life-time appointment. The elders ought to know better than anyone else in the congregation whether or not a particular deacon is still needed as a deacon. I do not believe that elders should appoint deacons without the consent of the congregation, but I do believe that a congregation should delegate to its eldership the right to remove men from the deaconate if they are no longer needed—or if they are not doing their work.

The question of tenure is far more important in connection with the eldership. Elders must not be lords over the congregation. To avoid being lords, they must know at all times that they serve by the consent of the congregation. When a man is appointed to the eldership with a life-time tenure, he may know that he had the consent of the congregation when he went into the eldership—but how does he know that he still has that consent after he has served for years? This is especially a problem in congregations with a high rate of turn-over. Many elders have been serving for so long that well over 90 percent of the congregation had no voice in their selection. In order to avoid the condition which is the very essence of lording it over the church, I believe that elders need to go back to the congregation at least every few years and ask if the congregation still wants them to serve as elders. And this should not simply be an opportunity for the members to raise Scriptural objections. If any member knows of any Scriptural reason why a particular elder should not continue to serve in the eldership, that member should have the right to present the objection at any time. If the eldership sustains the objection, the man in question is no longer an elder. An eldership, however, is not a private club. If a majority of the members of a congregation feel that a particular elder is no longer Scripturally qualified to serve in the eldership, the other elders should not have the right to keep that man in the eldership. To do so would clearly be to Lord it over the church.

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Having the consent of the congregation to continue serving in the eldership is the key element in avoiding lording it over the church. In order to have this consent, it is not enough that the members have the right to raise Scriptural objections to an elder who is no longer qualified to serve in the eldership. The congregation also needs to have the opportunity from time to time to express their preference. Since an eldership is not a private club, the other elders should not have the right to keep a man in the eldership when a majority of the members no longer want that man to serve as one of their elders—even if there are no Scriptural objections. An elder cannot lead those who are not willing to follow. A man cannot function effectively in the eldership without the consent of the congregation. If a majority of the members of a congregation ever say that they no longer want a particular elder to serve in the eldership, he is no longer an elder of that congregation.

One of the best ways to create an open atmosphere and keep the eldership in close touch with the congregation is for the congregation to know that every few years they will have the opportunity to express their approval or disapproval of each elder and deacon. Therefore, while there is no specific tenure system required by the Scriptures, there are good reasons to avoid the life-time tenure arrangement.

The Appointment of Elders and Deacons

Once elders and deacons have been selected by the congregation, they should be appointed. There should be some ceremony in which they are formally and publicly installed in office. Acts 14:23 says “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.” Prayer and fasting were evidently a part of the appointment ceremony in these congregations. Acts 1:6 tells how the apostles appointed the seven men selected by the Jerusalem congregation to administer the program of aid to widows: “They prayed and laid their hands upon them.” The laying on of hands was evidently a part of the appointment ceremony for elders. It is clear from the context of I Tim. 5:17-

22 that Paul was discussing the eldership. In I Tim. 5:22, Paul said, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands."

Some have assumed that the laying on of hands was only for the purpose of imparting miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is clear from Acts 8:17-18 that these gifts were bestowed only by the laying on of the apostles hands. However, that was not the only purpose for the laying on of hands. In the culture of the first century, the laying on of hands was a gesture often used for one who was being appointed or set apart for some special function. When Paul and Barnabas were chosen for missionary work, the preachers in Antioch appointed them to this work with fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands. Notice that in this case men who were not apostles laid hands on one who was an apostle (Acts 13:3). This could not have been for the purpose of imparting miraculous gifts. Paul laid hands on Timothy to impart miraculous gifts to him (II Tim. 1:6). But when Timothy was chosen to go with Paul on his missionary journeys, the elders laid hands on Timothy (I Tim. 4:14).

The gesture of the laying on of hands does not have the same significance in our culture as it did in the first century. It would be Scriptural to use that gesture as a part of a ceremony for appointing elders and deacons. But the important thing is the meaning, not the gesture. A ceremony for appointing elders and deacons should express the same idea of formally setting them apart for a special function. It would be appropriate to ask the congregation to fast before men are appointed as elders and deacons. Prayer should certainly be a part of the appointment ceremony.

These offices of leadership in the church are of great importance. Men should not be put into such offices lightly or casually. Everyone involved should be impressed with the tremendous importance of what is being done. A couple married by a justice of the peace is just as married as a couple married in a formal religious ceremony. But the formal religious ceremony is of great value in impressing on all concerned the great importance of the marriage relationship. In much the same way, a solemn, dignified ceremony for appointing men to the eldership and the diaconate has great merit.

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Acts 20:28 says that the Holy Spirit ordains those who serve as bishops. When a congregation selects these men and an evangelist appoints them in some kind of solemn ceremony, the Holy Spirit then ordains them. There is, however, no major distinction between the words *ordain* and *appoint*. It would not be improper to speak of a congregation ordaining elders and deacons. All that Acts 20:28 suggests is that in heaven the Holy Spirit recognizes the ordaining or appointing of elders in congregations here on this earth.

Acts 13:3 and I Tim. 4:14 indicate that preachers were ordained or appointed in a similar way in the early church. It used to be the custom in the churches of Christ to have such a ceremony of ordination or appointment for preachers. Over 50 years ago, when my father started preaching, the elders of his home congregation, the Broadway Church of Christ in Gainesville, Texas, had such a ceremony of ordination for him. In that ceremony, they told him that he was to be subject to the elders of the congregations where he would serve in the future. But they also told him that they would continue to assume some measure of responsibility for him. They said that they would continue to pray for him and keep in touch with him. They solemnly warned him that if he ever started preaching error or living a wicked life, he would have to answer to them as well as to the elders of the local congregation where he might be at the time. Much of the preacher trouble in the brotherhood could have been avoided if other elderships had taken a similar interest in the preachers who went out from their local congregations.

Conclusion

The churches of Christ throughout this nation need to consider seriously the pattern of leadership in local congregations. Most congregations need a major change in the style of leadership. Elders need to recognize that they are not lords over God's church. They are not a self-perpetuating board of directors functioning only as a decision-making body for the congregation. They are also bishops and pastors. Elders must improve their efficiency as decision-makers. They must learn to delegate more and supervise carefully.

They must find the time to function in their most important but most neglected role as shepherds of the Lord's church. They must create effective channels of communication to keep the members informed, to get input from the members, and to get the members more involved. They must lead by their example, their teaching and their persuasion rather than just giving orders.

The churches of Christ must also be on guard against the error of those who teach false doctrines concerning church leadership. Those who deny that the eldership has any decision-making authority at all must be resisted. Those who seek to change the structure of church organization must be resisted. Those who seek to change the structure of church organization must be opposed. Those who would move the churches of Christ away from the Bible pattern in the direction of a denominational pattern of rule by majority vote must be rejected. Those who favor, either in theory or in practice, the denominational system in which the preachers run the church must be renounced.

The truth is between these extremes and we must seek it patiently. As long as the church is made up of imperfect human beings, there will be a big difference between the reality of the church as it is and the vision of the church as it ought to be. It has taken us many years to develop the customs which have led to our present problems. These problems will not be corrected overnight. It may take many years to move the church closer to the kind of open leadership style presented in the Bible pattern. But we will not correct our problems at all or move any closer to the Bible pattern unless and until we recognize our problems and develop a clear understanding of the goals toward which we must strive. As long as we are making progress in the right direction, Christians should be patient and tolerant.

It is vitally important that the changes and improvements in church leadership come from within the eldership. If these changes have to be forced on elderships from without, the resulting trouble and division would greatly hinder the cause of Christ. The men who are now serving in the eldership are the only ones who are in a position to bring about the needed changes and improvements peacefully.

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Elders who have been lording it over the church need to be warned that their days are numbered. Truth is not on their side. The church of the future will not tolerate those who rule without the consent of the congregation. There is nothing in all the world as powerful as an idea whose time has come. And in regard to church leadership, the open style of leadership is an idea whose time has come. If elderships do not take the lead in seeking these needed changes and improvements, the changes and improvements will still come—but they will be forced on elderships from without. God will surely hold the unfaithful shepherds accountable for whatever trouble follows.

Preachers who are trying to lead the church away from the Bible pattern by their false doctrines also need to be warned that their days are numbered. Truth is not on their side and it will not take the brotherhood very long to realize their error. A brotherhood that has already grown weary of elders who lord it over the church will not accept for long the practices of preachers who lord it over the church. Those who persist in this error will find themselves more and more isolated from the fellowship of God's people.

My counsel to those who are not elders and who seek the changes and improvements outlined in this book is to be as patient and tolerant as you can as long as your elders are making any progress at all in the right direction. If you are in a congregation where the eldership is lording it over the church and not making any effort to improve or if you are in a congregation where the preacher is leading the church toward an opposite extreme that is equally wrong, you should try to persuade them to repent. If you cannot, you may have to move to another local congregation. In the long run, the best approach may be to concentrate on training the next generation of elders and preachers to be and to do what God requires. In seeking those changes and improvements that will return the church to the Bible pattern of leadership, be careful that you do not do more harm than good. Changes of this nature take a long time. What we are dealing with is a process of education and that takes years to accomplish.

Even if changes and improvements come from within present elderships, it will still take a long time. A lengthy

period of careful study is needed. The members must be taught. Much in-service training for those already in leadership positions is required. A great emphasis on pre-service training is even more essential. Remember that it is possible to keep the ultimate goal in mind while patiently taking only small steps day by day in that direction. In this as in all other matters, let all things be done in love to the glory of God.