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"Enclosed please find a check of \$95.00. Also a couple of addresses I wish for you to add to your list. As I get more addresses I'll try to send them, unless they send them, themselves." – **Virginia McCoy, OH.** (*You do us a great favor by sending us names of those who will be benefited by Banner of Truth. This helps us to build our mailing list of interested people. Also thanks for your check to help us make BOT possible.* – Editor).

"Thank you so much for sending me the back issues of Banner of Truth and for putting me on you mailing list. I love the Lord's church and I really want to know what dangers to look for in the church as well as elsewhere. Please do keep me informed. Digression sneaks up on a congregation one little step at a time some times. I just want to be what to be what God wants me to be and do the things which God wants me to do. I'm enclosing a money order to help with Banner of Truth. I wish it was more. Thanks again." – **Carolyn Loveday, MS.** (*You are so right. I've seen congregations and individuals turn from the "old paths" many times. Thanks.* – Editor).

"I have read your request in B.O.T. and am sending this small amount to you and sister Naomi. It is a crying shame when some people no longer want the truth. It seems that want watered down and man's word anymore. I myself am an outcast for speaking up for the truth and also speaking about man's modern versions. When I speak for what we have authority to do and not to do according to God's word they call me a scribe. I am told I talk too much and look for too many things wrong with the way they teach and believe. They think almost everything should be done for the children. Entertainment of all kinds.... When I bring these things to their attention; then I'm causing trouble and division. I'm not wanted. May the good Lord continue to bless both of you; and please don't ever turn from the truth. Keep up His good work. Happy Holidays." – **Den Ferguson, TN.** (*The time was that members of the church would be criticized when they did things which were not authorized by God's word. It is so different now. One may now well be criticized for upholding God's truth. Most of the criticism I receive is for stating what God's word teaches on various subject, rather than upholding something which God's word does not uphold. Thanks for the help you sent. Brethren have been good to support our work and this is a great encouragement to us.* – Editor).

EDITOR'S EMAIL: [wpiggbot@myshadetree.com](mailto:wpiggbot@myshadetree.com)  
ELECTRONIC BOT: *Via David Lemmons' website*  
BOT.LemmonsAid.net  
DAVID'S LEMMONSAID E-MAIL:  
[LemmonsAid-Subscribe@YahooGroups.com](mailto:LemmonsAid-Subscribe@YahooGroups.com)  
EMAIL: [dlemmons@netscape.com](mailto:dlemmons@netscape.com)



## God's Plan For Elders In The Church

*Will God's plan work? Or, is His plan flawed? Where can we go to get the true answer? Only to God's word.*

Editor's Note: We ran this article in *Banner of Truth* almost seven years ago, and have received several positive comments. It is my opinion that the need for a study on elders is as great now, if not greater, than it was seven years ago.

A number of readers of *Banner of Truth* have suggested that there is a very real and urgent need to give attention to the study of elders and the part they are to play in God's plan for His church. From what I have seen in years gone by, what I am seeing today, and what I am hearing from others, I certainly concur. In fact, this appears to be one of the most important aspects of the church to which we need to give attention. In God's plan for elders, if carried out, is the potential of the greatest thing which can be done for the well-being of the church in this "present distress."

On the other hand, if God's plan for elders is not put into action, there is bound to be a further weakening of the church, as God's word is treasured and respected less and less. With this in mind we set forth the following thoughts on the subject of elders, trusting that some might be provoked to give more serious attention to the matter put-

ting God's plan into action to the greatest extent possible. Due to the volume of material regarding elders and the limitations of space, we can do little more than scratch the surface. May what we say encourage further serious study of this important subject.

It is important that we grasp God's plan for the church. That plan was not made on the spur of the moment, nor was it made to meet some unforeseen need. God's "manifold wisdom" was (and is) evidenced by the church "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11). Our omniscient God of heaven knew the church would be needed, and He knew what it needed to be in order to fulfill its divine purpose in the salvation of man, even before man's appearance and fall into sin.

The church was planned as God wanted it, and with this in mind, we are better prepared to discuss the highly important subject, God's Plan For Elders In The Church.

From what we see in the church today, it appears that there some doubt as to whether God's plan for elders will work. Could it be

## BANNER OF TRUTH

Published by the  
Hickory Grove  
church of Christ

1131 Hickory Grove Rd., Almo KY 42020

Elders:

Jimmy Lockhart (270) 753-4460

Mike Smith (270) 437-4616

Preacher:

Tim Hester (270) 767-0625

Editor

Walter W. Pigg (270) 753-3675

164 Coles Campground Rd., Murray, KY 42071

Assistant Editor:

Alan Adams (850) 937-2460

1653 Pine Lane Dr., Cantonment, FL 32533

Published monthly and sent free to interested persons. Made possible by the contributions of congregations and individuals. Our purpose is to: 1) Teach and uphold God's truth; 2) Encourage mission efforts to seek the lost; 3) Oppose that which is "contrary to sound doctrine" and not in harmony with the "doctrine of Christ."

*Continued from Page 1*

that some think God's plan is flawed?

By analogy, we recall the young preacher who once said, "Church discipline doesn't always work." Perhaps he meant that the person disciplined is not always restored. That is true, but restoration is not the only purpose in discipline. If the individual can't be restored, then discipline serves the purpose of removing that bad influence from the congregation. Paul commanded the Corinthian brethren, "not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one no not to eat." Then he added, "...put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Cor. 5:11, 13). This involves discipline.

Evidently a majority of brethren do not believe discipline will work, since it is so seldom practiced. I've heard people say, "I just don't believe

it will work." This may be the reason that it is virtually a forgotten command.

Yes, discipline will always work if done according to God's plan. So, too, will God's plan for elders work. Let us, then, turn our attention to this subject.

### I. Will God's Plan For Elders In His Church Work?

Some suggest that such a question is unfair. In one sense I would agree. Those who have a genuine, living faith "which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6) do not doubt God's plan on any matter. However, the fact of the matter is that many brethren demonstrate by their actions that there is some doubt as to whether or not God's plan will work. Though they might not affirm this by words, their actions serve as evidence. An implicit faith in God's word is lacking. Let us cite further evidence of this.

Though God has set forth by inspiration the qualifications to be met by those serving as elders [We shall note those later, wp], there are a number of ideas relative to the selecting of elders which settle for less than the God-given qualifications. We shall consider four ideas.

CHOOSE THE BEST YOU HAVE. In my first full-time work a well known preacher suggested to me that some brethren just select the best men in the congregation and make them elders. It is difficult to understand how brethren could do this and still claim to have respect for God's word. If this could be done with respect to elders, then why couldn't the same principle be followed in other areas? That is, why couldn't people settle for less than what God has specified in other areas? If God had intended for this to be done, would He not at the end of the qualifications for elders have added, "Or, the best you have in the congregation?" This best-you-have idea comes from the wisdom of men, not God.

QUALIFICATIONS IN THE ELDERSHIP. This view is that no one elder is to possess all the qualifications. In

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**"That ye may be fellow-helpers  
to the truth" (3 John 8).**

Our sincere thanks for making our work possible. Every contribution of any size is indeed greatly appreciated. May this serve as a personal note of thank for every contributor. Time does not allow me to send a note of personal thanks to everyone who helps us, but I wish it were so that I could do that.

You are helping to get the truth out to several thousand people, both here in our own country and in several foreign countries. Many thanks from readers are received.

— Editor

## Banner of Truth Financial Report

October, November, December 2004

Balance on hand Oct. 1, 2004	13,244.61
Oct., Nov., Dec. contribution	3,210.00
Total funds available	16,454.61
Oct., Nov., Dec. expenses:	
E-mail (October)	21.95
Internet for one year	117.00
Plates (Oct. & Nov.)	70.00
Mailing labels (Oct. – Dec.)	95.25
Strapping material	54.88
Envelopes, tape, supplies	87.20
Stamps	75.40
Mailing B.O.T. (Oct. & Nov.)	1,697.74
Phone calls	12.62
Total expenses	2,232.06
Total funds available	16,454.61
Less Oct., Nov., Dec. expenses	2,232.06
Total balance on hand Dec. 31	14,222.55

## Readers' Response

"Enclosed is a donation for Banner of Truth. It's a privilege to support your publication. We appreciate so very much your insightful articles and your much-needed perseverance in continuing this work. God bless you with a long and continually fruitful life in His service. In Christian love—**Ralph & Nancy Hammett.**" — AL. (Your encouraging words are greatly appreciated. Also, thanks for your help with our work for the Lord. WWP).

"Thank you so much for Banner of Truth. We look forward to reading each issue and enjoy the information contained therein. Its good to see someone standing for the truth, for the world really needs sound doctrine and not today's hearsay. May this small contribution help in keeping the Banner going. Use it where it will do the most good — **Paul & Shirley Tuller.**" — TX. (The truth is worth standing for, since it is the only thing which will make men free. Thanks for the contribution — Editor).

"We at the church of Christ on the Damon Road have been greatly encouraged by the articles in Banner of Truth. Keep up the good work. In Christ — **Church of Christ on the Damon Road.**" — VT. (Thanks for your encouraging words and the help for Banner of Truth. We are thankful that BOT is helpful. — Editor)

**Address Changed? Let us know!**



to become qualified to serve as an elder, it is just as possible that one can become *unqualified*. In this case, God’s approval would be lacking for his continuing to serve in that capacity.

ELDERS CONTROL THE NUMBER OF ELDERS. This view maintains that the elders of a congregation have the authority to limit the number of elders. The rule with which I agree is that the congregation is to select men to serve as elders.

In the account Acts 5:3, the apostles told the brethren to, “look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom ye may appoint over this business.” This is an example of congregational selection of men to serve in some capacity, in this case the serving of “tables.” If elders have the authority to control the number of elders, and to appoint other elders, this would enable them to maintain a self-perpetuating eldership. By what scriptural arguments could such an idea as this be upheld? I’ve not seen such.

ELDERS ARE HOLY SPIRIT APPOINTED. There is obviously a sense in which this is true, but not true in the way some have attempted to apply it. When qualified men are selected as elders, there is Holy Spirit approval. But on the other hand, one case comes to mind where the elders of a congregation were going to appoint a man as an elder over the stated objections of more than a dozen members. When these objections were made, the elders said no one would be made an elder. A preacher, speaking in defense of the elders, said the elders were “Holy Spirit appointed.” The obvious implication was that the elders were right in their scheme because they were “Holy Spirit appointed.”

It would be a serious charge to maintain that many of those serving as elders today were appointed by the Holy Spirit. Take for example, elders of congregations who bring in false teachers to influence their flocks, something which is happening in many places. The Holy Spirit in no sense

of the term sanctions such evil as this. The spirit behind such action of this is certainly not Holy. The Holy Spirit is not going to uphold that which is contrary to the revealed word of God. He doesn’t oppose Himself, and who can believe otherwise?

ELDERS HAVE NO AUTHORITY. A few years ago there was a considerable discussion of this idea. Some maintained that elders could only serve as “examples,” and that they had no authority. This is an outright disregard for the teaching of the New Testament.

The passage which first comes to mind as verifying that elders *do* have authority, is Hebrews 13:17: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account....” To the Thessalonians Paul writes, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (I Thess. 5:12). Elders are to take the “oversight” over the “flock of God” (I Pet. 5:2). Paul says: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour...” (I Tim. 5:17). The terms “bishop” and “overseers” suggest authority which has been given elders.

The idea that elders have no authority came from men, not God. It should be noted that the authority of elders is limited. They cannot make laws of faith or in any way change or limit God’s word. Their authority is in matters of option and expediency. But these matters must be such that God’s will is not violated in carrying them out. Elders have no authority to forbid the teaching of God’s word, as is some times done.

ELDERS HAVE DICTATORIAL POWER. The idea that elders are “bosses,” as we commonly use that term, that they have the authority to “dictate” is foreign to God’s word. The Holy Spirit through the apostle Peter expressly deals with this issue in a way that is very easy to understand: “Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being

## Neutralizing the Bible

Alan Adams

Raise the question of drinking alcoholic beverages and you will see equivocation brought to an art form by not a few professed Bible believers. Equivocal is defined as “having two or more meanings; purposely ambiguous” or, “uncertain, doubtful.” People who desire to hold Christ in one hand and the world in the other have found much comfort in neutralizing the Bible’s moral/spiritual terminology relegating it to the realm of relativity and ambiguity. They strip words of any actual meaning and application rendering them as impotent space-fillers void of meaning, and therefore application. Treating the Word this way is tantamount to being like those who would “set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof” (Prov 1:25).

Think of such terms as “fornication,” “adultery,” “lasciviousness,” “nakedness,” “modest[y],” “division,” “strife,” “faith,” “obedience,” “repentance,” and others. One of the quickest ways to cause some people to squirm, even be offended, is to define such words in objective and absolute terms. To them precision is equivalent to turning on a very bright light, everybody can see; which is precisely why Jesus was rejected by so many:

And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God (Jno 3:19-21).

Operating from such premises as: One, the words which comprise the Bible are words chosen by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:13); Two, human beings have the capacity to “understand” (Eph 3:4) the meaning of these words; Three, the words of the Bible are precise and propositional in usage (cf. Gal 3:16); and, Four, application of the meaning of biblical words will determine our eternal destiny (1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-20); a reasonable person will then reject the popular notion of the Bible which says, “The Bible means what it means to you, and then again it means what it means

to me.”

Back to drinking alcohol: Setting aside, for the moment: the meaning of “wine” (Gr. *oinos*) as it’s used in various contexts; what Paul means by “much wine” (1 Tim 3:8); and other such questions, let’s deal squarely with the fact that the Holy Spirit says that people who “[practice] drunkenness” are not going to “inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:20). A typical response to this word (drunkenness) is, “That just means don’t get drunk; it doesn’t forbid drinking.”

Of course, we are disposed to ask, “How much drinking results in drunkenness”? This is where relativity and equivocation kick in. Our own language can’t even decide. We have “sot drunk,” “snoot-full,” “tipsy,” “gassed,” “feeling good,” and so on. Your “drunk” might be my “feeling good,” and vice versa. Give this sort of thing its head and we ultimately make the word “drunkenness” meaningless. Thus, we have the Bible saying, “If you practice this indefinite unidentifiable thing you will not go to Heaven.”

Carl Sandburg’s *Abraham Lincoln* (Vol. I) has a section that shows the folly of this sort of thing. He tells of a Dr. John Allen to whom Lincoln was drawn. Allen, Sandburg said, “...never let up on his steady, quiet arguments against slavery and whiskey” (p. 166). Sandburg then went on to tell of a situation both humorous and sobering as it pertains to the question of drinking:

Even the Hard-shell Baptist church was not then ready to take a stand against whiskey. When Mentor Graham, the schoolmaster, joined the temperance reform movement, the church trustees suspended him. Then, to hold a balance and hand out even justice all around, the trustees suspended another church member who had gone blind drunk. This action puzzled one member, who stood up and took from his pocket a quart bottle half full, which he shook till it bubbled, as he drawled: “Brethering, you have turned one member out beca’s he would not drink, and another beca’s he got drunk, and now I wants to ask a question. How much of this ’ere critter does a man have to drink to remain in full fellership in this church?” (166-7). ↵

one divorcing his mate if he is to have a Scriptural right to remarry.

God's grace will not save one who refuses to be baptized for the remission of his sins (Mk. 16:16), or one who insists on worshipping with an instrument. God's grace will never sanction and adulterous marriage. Read the Bible and you will know what will cause you to lose your soul.

—P.O.Box 975, Rowlett, TX 75030

### ***Absurdities In Religion***

Have you ever wondered why people who are levelheaded in the realm of secular things often act in absurd ways in religion? It is quite a common thing for people who claim to believe in God and His all-sufficient word for mankind, to uphold or believe in things which are clearly and strongly condemned by God's Word, which word they claim to believe. Not only is this hypocritical, it is absurd.

In an article entitled "Two Episcopalians Discuss Gay Clergy," in the Oct. 26, 2004, issue of *The Paducah Sun*, we find a prime example of Absurdities In Religion. The following statement was from Eva Markham in her support of Robinson, a homosexual, becoming a bishop. She said:

We have a gay clergy...We have gay bishops...we need to be honest. We bless houses...We bless dogs and cats. Why can't we have the relationship of bishops of the same sex?...

If people actually believe in God and His word, what could be more absurd than the above? My Dad used to talk about people who had fallen away from uprightness as having "Gone to the dogs." In the above case this religion has literally "gone to the dogs," and "to the cats."

It is very hard to believe that people actually believe God's word, when by their actions they act in such absurd ways. Another example of absurdity is for people to claim they believe in God's word and then claim that God made people homosexuals, when God's word so clearly condemns this sin. Have they never heard of Sodom and Gomorrah? or read Romans 1 and I Cor. 6:9-11?

—Editor

## **Fifth Annual Banner of Truth Lectures 2005**

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ensamples to the flock" (I Pet. 5:3). The desire for power constitutes a serious problem with some elders. They have the idea that they are sort of "above the law," that they are not to be questioned about anything. They have the spirit of Diotrephes. In some instances the flock is kept completely in the dark concerning the business of the church.

Years ago brethren in an Arkansas congregation went to court to force the elders to make available to the congregation the finances of the congregation. The elders maintained that they had authority to keep the information from the members. When elders fail to keep the flock informed as to what is going on, they are violating Peter's instruction, not to Lord it over God's heritage. Elders aren't dictators.

ELDERS ARE MERE FIGUREHEADS. This, in some instances, is sadly true, but God's approval is lacking. In some congregations the shots are called by someone behind the scene. The "elders" have little to do with decision making. We have all heard of "she elders." Such certainly ought not to be, but in some cases it is a fact that the wife of an elder may actually do the decision making.

My wife and I visited with a congregation several years ago where there was actually one "she elder." This lady invited us to have breakfast at her home. She let us know that she had invited us over in order to question us about a number of things. In fact, she proceeded to give me a going over for what I had preached on Sunday morning though she had not even been present. But word gets around. She had the audacity to ask me if I could work with the congregation. Her husband, supposed to be one of the elders of the congregation, sat there closed-mouthed, not uttering a single word.

THE "MAIN" OR "CHIEF" ELDER. There is no indication in the New Testament that a single elder has authority over a congregation, but rather the eldership in its plurality. History confirms that the

apostasy of the early church, which ultimately resulted in the Roman Catholic Church, had its beginning in part when one individual elder in a congregation became the "chief elder," exercising more authority than the others. It is a sad matter of fact that in some elderships today there is a "chief elder." This is contrary to God's will, and the elders who allow one man to become the chief are not without guilt themselves.

### **III. The Scriptural Qualifications Of Elders**

In First Timothy chapter three and Titus one, God's qualifications for elders are set forth. To suggest that these requirements are not binding, is to say that we are liberty to disregard God's word as our complete, all-sufficient guide. Yet, it should be a matter of grave concern that in the selection of elders these qualifications are virtually ignored. Men are appointed as elders some times on the basis that they are successful business men, or that they have a lot of money. In some cases it is a matter of kinship friendship, or popularity. Some become elders because they electioneered for the position.

In First Timothy, Paul says, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (3:1). Time and again I have heard people say, "The first qualification is that one must desire the office" but this is not a qualification, rather a person's desire to use his talents in serving the Lord. One must serve willingly, not because there is no other choice. When a man does measure up to the stated qualifications, then it is understandable that he would desire to be used in an important way.

But I'm fully convinced, due to what I have seen, that this "desire" should be considered very seriously as to the nature of it. There is no question but that serving as a scriptural elder is one of the most awesome responsibilities one could accept. It is not a matter to be considered lightly. The sincere individual would likely reflect upon his qualifications for such an important task. A

lesson might be learned from the appointment of Moses as a leader of the Israelites. Though he did accept the great responsibility, he was not pioneering for it. The individual who desires to be an elder so much that he is running for the job, may be seeking a place to exercise authority which he has never been able to exercise before.

Due to the number of qualifications we must be very brief relative to them. We would encourage a more detailed study than we are able to do here. We note such things as:

BLAMELESS. (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6). Above reproach. Nothing laid to one's charge.

HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE. (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6). In Greek, a "one woman man."

VIGILANT. (I Tim. 3:2). One who is watchful, alert, on guard against error.

SOBER. (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). Of sound mind, able to make good judgments.

OF GOOD BEHAVIOR. (I Tim. 3:2). Orderly, modest, well-behaved, upright.

GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY. One who is friendly and generous to guest, who enjoys fellowship and association with others.

APT TO TEACH. (I Tim. 3:2). Skilled in teaching. Able to give instructions.

NOT GIVEN TO WINE. (I Tim. 3:3. One who does not even get "one drink drunk."

NO STRIKER. (I Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). Not a brawler, quarrelsome, or quick tempered person.

NOT GREEDY OF FILTHY LUCRE. (I Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). A materialist, whose goal is gain.

PATIENT. (I Tim. 3:3). Gentle, forbearing, mild, not easily disturbed.

NOT A BRAWLER. (I Tim. 3:3). Not abusive, quarrelsome, or looking for a fight.

NOT COVETOUS. (I Tim. 3:3). Not a lover of money, who values spiritual treasures less.

RULETH WELL HIS OWN HOUSE. (I Tim. 3:4). A man

who is head of his family, having his children in subjection.

FAITHFUL CHILDREN. (Tit. 1:6). ["Having children that believe,"ASV]. Children who are believers, are faithful to Christ.

NOT A NOVICE. (I Tim. 3:6). Not new in the faith. Not a new convert.

GOOD REPORT BY THOSE WITHOUT. (I Tim. 3:7). Of good and honorable reputation by those who are outside the church.

A LOVER OF GOOD MEN. (Tit. 1:8). One who loves good things, including good men.

JUST. (Tit. 1:8). Right in character.

HOLY. (Tit. 1:8). Not wicked or defiled by sin. A Godly person.

TEMPERATE. (Tit. 1:8). One who is able to exercise self-control in speech and actions.

HOLDING FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD. (Tit. 1:9). Able to keep the word when opposed. Able to "exhort and convince the gainsayers" by "sound doctrine."

NOT SELF-WILLED. (Tit. 1:7). Not one who must have his way in everything. Stubborn.

NOT SOON ANGRY. Not ready to "fly off the handle," not hot-tempered.

#### IV. The Work Of Elders

It is very evident that there is a widespread misconception of the work of elders. It reminds me of a children's game: someone is tagged and it is declared, "You're it." To be an elder in the biblical sense of the term, is much more than wearing a title. It is a *function*, a work to be done. When one ceases to function he ceases to be an elder and should no longer claim to be.

In Acts 20:28-30, Paul notes some of the primary duties of elders. As "overseers," they are to "take heed" unto themselves. Making certain that they were conforming to God's will in the matter, this would involve serious attention as to their responsibilities in this great work. In the second place, they were told to "feed the flock." Just as a

## "I Just Don't Know If He Will Be Lost If . . ."

Marvin L. Weir

Many parents abandon logic and reason when sinful situations occur that involve their children. These parents convince themselves that the Scriptures are not that clear regarding the matter, and question whether or not God's grace will surprise some with what it covers. We need to be very careful lest we accuse God of failing to supply us with a clear roadmap to Heaven. The Psalmist did not hesitate to exalt God's Word as a clear and adequate guide. He said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). It is also very clear that God's grace will never cover sin when one refuses to repent (Lk. 13:3). Let us consider several statements I've heard brethren make over the years.

**"I just don't know if my son will be lost if he is not baptized."** The Word of God clearly states that salvation is located *in Christ* (2 Tim. 2:10). Where is the Scripture that states that hearing, belief, repentance, or confession puts one into Christ? You will search in vain for such a Scripture. But listen as Paul speaks to the Galatians, saying, "For as many of you as *were baptized into Christ* did *put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27, emp. MLW). One is not *in Christ* who has not been scripturally immersed for the remission of his sins (cf. Acts 2:38). Belief does not wash away one's sins. Baptism will, however, wash away one's penitent sins. The Bible gives us such an example in Paul's conversion. Ananias goes to Paul and says, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, *and be baptized, and wash away thy sins*, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16, emp. MLW).

Let me also add that bible baptism is always a *burial* – not a *sprinkling*. Romans 6:4 declares, "We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life." You will observe that *newness* of life comes after one has been baptized and not before. The bible makes it very clear that one is not a new creature who is not in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who refuses to be scripturally baptized is lost in his sins.

**"I just don't know if my daughter will be lost if she worships using instrumental music."** The question is, "Will God accept instrumental music in worship?" The answer is a resounding "No." The command from the Lord is that His followers *must* worship God "in spirit and in truth" (Jno. 4:24). Do we know what the truth is? The Scriptures declare that God's Word is truth (Jno. 17:17). Does God's truth (His Word) authorize worship to Him using instrumental music? No. Do we have a New Testament example of the early church worshipping God using instrumental music? No, not a single one. If worship to God must be according to truth, and there is not one word in the New Testament to sustain or authorize one worshipping with an instrument, then instrumental music will make one's worship vain.

Christians are commanded to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). The New Testament reveals that Jesus and His disciples sang hymns (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). Paul and Silas sang while in prison (Acts 16:25). Paul mentions singing with the "spirit" and with "understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15). The Hebrew writer says, "I will declare my name unto my brethren, In the midst of the congregation will I *sing* thy praise (Heb. 2:12, emp. MLW). James admonishes those who are cheerful to sing songs (Jas. 5:13). What is conspicuously absent in Scriptures that mention singing praises to God? That's right, it is the instrument which must be *added* by man as it is missing from God's Word.

**"I just don't know if my child will be lost if he divorces his wife for some reason other than adultery and remarries."** The general rule according to the Bible is that marriage is for life, and the death of a mate is the only thing that will free one to marry again without committing adultery (Rom. 7:2-3). The Pharisees asked Christ if it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for any reason and the Lord said, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). There is one thing, however, that God says can sever the marriage bond – adultery. The Lord gives an exception to the general rule in saying, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (Matt. 19:9). There are not 777 scriptural reasons that allow one to divorce his mate and remarry – there is only one. Adultery must be the motivating cause for

## Courage and Obedience

Brock Hartwigsen

The story about Jesus stilling the storm (Mk. 4:35-41), can teach us an important lesson about the relationship between courage and obedience. There will be times in our lives when it will take courage to step out and do what God wants us to do. Sometimes His instructions go against the norm and what our senses tell us. To do something which does not seem right, safe or smart takes courage.

A Christian's courage is drawn from his faith, but not simply a faith that God and Jesus exist. It takes a three-fold faith. We must have faith in God and Jesus' existence, plus faith in their strength, plus faith that they love us enough to take care of us. Just because they exist is meaningless if they are powerless. Even with all their power, if they don't care for us, that what good will their strength do us?

When the storm was at its worst and the disciples feared for their lives, they awake Jesus and asked Him, "Master, carest not that we perish?" implying that that He was not concerned about them. After Jesus stilled the storm He questioned the disciples faith, "how is it that ye have no faith?" (vs. 40).

They had faith in Jesus' power or they would not have awakened Him with their plea, "carest not that we perish?" While they were impressed with what He did (vs. 41), they obviously already believed He could do something about the storm. If they didn't, then why wake Him, implying that He didn't care for them? What they did not have faith in was Christ's love and concern for them.

Mary Baker express this fear in the first verse of her hymn, *Peace Be Still*:

Master the tempest is raging!  
The billows are tossing high!  
The sky is o'er-shadowed with blackness;  
No shelter or help is nigh.  
"Carest Thou not that we perish?"  
How canst Thou lie asleep  
When each moment so madly is threatening  
A grave in the angry deep?

Many today have faith in the facts of Jesus and God, even faith in their strength, but they lack faith in their

words, their love and their concern. This is demonstrated when they fail to obey Jesus because they think they know better. They believe that what Jesus asks them is the wrong thing so they don't do it. In essence, what they are saying with their disobedience is that, "If Jesus really loved me He would not ask this of me. Jesus, carest thou not that I perish, how can thou ask such a thing of me?"

Jesus said "resist not evil," turn the cheek, give your coat as well as your cloak, go two miles instead of just one, "love your enemies...do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Matt. 5:38-42). "That won't work today! Jesus, carest thou not that I will be taken advantage of, how canst thou ask such a thing of me?"

Jesus said "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth..." (Matt. 6:19-21). "Yea, right! Jesus carest thou not that I need these treasures on earth if I am going to be able to retire and have the good life when I am old, how canst thou ask such a thing of me?"

Brethren today reject Jesus' teaching about divorce and remarriage, the role of men and women in the home- church – society, withdrawing of any kind of fellowship with a wayfaring brother, etc. Why, because they believe the teachings are too harsh – unfair – too burdensome to bear. In essence they are saying, by their actions, that they believe Jesus doesn't care for them or He would not have asked such a thing of them in the first place.

To find the courage and strength to do the right thing a Christian must have faith. Not simply faith in the existence of God and Jesus and their power, but also faith in their love and concern for mankind.

We need to take heart and never forget their love. After all, didn't God love us enough to send Jesus and didn't Jesus love us enough to die for us? How can any true believer question their love? Anything and everything they ask of us is not only fair, just and right, but is also the best for us.

We serve the Almighty, omnipotent God of the universe. There are not only no god's stronger than Him, there are no true gods but Him. He is more than strength. He is love. When we have faith in His love we will find the courage to do the right thing no matter how difficult or painful it might be.

—12521 Holly Sp. New Hill Rd., Apex, NC 27502

literal flock will weaken and die without food, so will a spiritual flock, a congregation of God's people die without sustenance, guidance and protection.

"Apt to teach" is one of the qualifications of an elder (I Tim. 3:2). I've heard that word "apt" used in the sense of: "You just can't tell about that man, he is *apt* to do most anything." But, as applied to an elder, it means to be "skilled in teaching" [*Vine's*]. This involves the knowledge necessary to teach. One can hardly teach that which he doesn't know. Closely related to this qualification is Paul's statement to Titus: "Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayer" (Titus 1:9). The importance of this should not be minimized.

To effectively serve as "overseers," it is essential that elders be knowledgeable and able to teach. Not only is this necessary in order to "feed the flock," but also to be able to withstand the "gainsayers" and protect the flock against this danger. Peter points out that elders are to "feed the flock of God...taking the oversight thereof." He also says that it is not to be done by "constraint, but willingly..." Rather than being "lords over God's heritage" they are to be "ensamples to the flock" (I Pet. 5:2-3). It cannot be expected that the flock will rise above the examples set forth by the elders.

As rulers of the congregation, the elders "watch for your souls as they that must give account..." (Heb. 13:17). If elders are to "watch" for the souls of the flock, they must surely know those who make up the flock. It is also true that there must be a deep concern for everyone. If signs of sickness (physical, and more importantly spiritual) arise, attention should be given as quickly as possible in order to bring about a cure and prevent a worsening of the condition, even to the point of spiritual death.

When the various words and terms used with

regard to elders are considered, it is clear both as to the high standards involved and the nature of their work. In this connection it should be pointed out that if elders are to accomplish their highly important and God-given task, it is necessary for the flock to "obey" and "submit" to the rule of the elders when it is manifested in harmony with their delegated authority (Heb. 3:17)

If we will be honest with God and with ourselves, we must admit that there is a most serious problem within the church today due to the lack of qualified elders. The nature of the problem is such that it can rightfully be called:

### V. The Eldership Crisis

The lack of qualified elders is not something new, but the failure to carry out God's Plan For Elders In The Church has become much more serious within the past few decades. The statement: "Elders are the greatest problem within the church today" is being heard more often.

I both agree with this statement I agree, and will point out in some of the reasons for so doing.

Let me point out that churches which have true, God-approved elders, doing the work which God intended, are fortunate and blessed with one of the greatest blessings. On the other hand, congregations which are not so blessed, and neither have competent leadership among the men, are in a very precarious condition.

It would be most interesting to know just how many scriptural elderships would be found if a hundred congregations were surveyed. I would not hazard a guess as to the exact number, but it would be frighteningly few. Many brethren would agree with this assessment.

We are seeing the tragic results of this condition, in that congregations are leaving "the old paths" as never before in our lives. It is so sad that many have become denominational in so many ways and yet claim to be Christ's church.

Elders, if they function as God intended, will take their work seriously, always striving to the

utmost to fulfill their duties. When this occurs, the congregations will prosper in spiritual growth and maturity, and numerical growth will result. When this is lacking, when the elders do not function properly, the Devil will be successful in bringing great hurt and lack of progress upon the congregation. We shall note a few things which are happening today due to the eldership crisis. All these are not true in every congregation, but some are found in a great many. In some instances, a number of problems are evident in a single congregation.

#### VI. Evidence Of Eldership Crisis

**LACK OF PROPER TEACHING.** A primary duty of elders is to see the flock is properly fed. But in general we are no longer a "people of the book," as we once were. It is evident that people are not studying as they should. And, much of what is being learned is not in harmony with God's word. Not only is proper feeding not being provided, in some instances so-called "elders" are actually bringing in false teachers. This happens right here in our own area as it does all across the country. In some instances elders have no idea as to what is being taught in classes. Teaching material is not examined closely. Unreliable versions of the Bible are being used more widely. Elders meeting with teachers, in some cases, never takes place. Some elders are not capable of teaching.

**CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS NOT PRACTICED.** This is such a common problem that when it is done it is certainly the exception and not the rule. Members can be involved in all sorts of sinful practices and elders never do a thing about it. Elders should take the lead in discipline, and see that the members participate.

**LOST SHEEP ARE NOT SOUGHT.** It is not uncommon for members to drift away and elders never put forth effort to find them and bring them back to a state of faithfulness. All members have a responsibility in this area but elders are to take the lead, to set an example.

**FELLOWSHIP WITH ERROR IS ALLOWED.** If the New Testament teaches anything, it teaches that faithful Christians cannot fellowship error. Yet, members may have fellowship with very liberal congregations with no rebuke from their elders who are supposed to "watch" for their souls. Announcements of activities of liberal congregations are some times made by those claiming to be sound. Elders allow this to happen.

**FALSE TEACHING IS TOLERATED.** Some elders, seemingly thinking that if nothing is said the false teaching will simply go away, will not take issue with false teachers. The teaching of error by preachers or teachers, or any member, should not be tolerated, "no not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5). Some elders would not know truth from error in some areas.

**INPUT FROM CONGREGATION NOT DESIRED.** The church is not a democracy, but people cannot be led effectively when their minds are unknown. In close relation to this is the failure to keep members informed. In some instances there is never an opportunity given for members to be informed about the work of the church and various things related to it. The work of elder is to lead, not drive. There is a huge differ between the two.

**ELDERS STANDING ON ERROR.** Not only is error some times tolerated, the number of elders who outright uphold error is increasing. Some of our most blatant false teachers are allowed access to congregations because elders themselves are false teachers. The members who stand by and let such happen are not guiltless.

**UNTAUGHT ELDERS.** Some elders do not hold "fast the faithful word" because they have never been taught. They are not able to "convince" anyone by "sound doctrine." The ability to recognize truth from error is some times lacking. This has no doubt contributed greatly to the spread of error.

**UNINFORMED ELDERS.** With all the error that is floating around in our brotherhood today, elders who are not informed as to what is going on are

running a great risk. A false doctrine can be brought into a congregation and take root without it being known by the elders until it is too late to deal with it effectively. Elders who are too busy to keep informed, are just too busy to be elders.

**"LORDS OVER GOD'S HERITAGE."** God has given elders authority to "rule" over the flock. About this there should be no doubt. But this authority is not as a dictator. Most members of the church resent being "bossed" in their congregational relationship. Whereas it is not difficult to "submit" to elders who serve as exemplary leaders, submitting to those who rule with an "iron hand" is a different matter. If the awesomeness of the responsibilities in serving as an elder was given serious thought, the desire for assuming unauthorized power might be curbed somewhat.

**FAILURE TO SUPPORT PREACHERS.** If a preacher is preaching the truth with the right motive, it is for the good of the congregation that the elders, at least occasionally, let it be known that they stand behind the preacher. A preacher should never be left out on a limb when the truth he presents is not accepted by some members, and the elders fail to stand by him. I've known this to happen. If the preacher is not preaching the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), he should be stopped immediately. Error is never deserving of more time.

**SPECIAL INTEREST INFLUENCE.** In some instances elders may listen to certain individuals or groups while closing their ears to others. A very liberal contributor may carry much more weight than the average member. Some times just one or two members have enough influence that they can make a big difference in the decisions made by the elders. "Kinfolks" can and do some times influence decisions.

**LACK OF TRUSTWORTHINESS.** Every member of the church ought to be trustworthy, but with those serving as elders it is a must. It is a sad day when elders do not keep promises, or state things which aren't true. This should never happen, but unfor-

tunately it does. I know.

**THE SOLUTION TO ELDER PROBLEMS.** We have noted a number of problems and others could be mentioned. But these mentioned problems could be solved by submitting completely to God's word in the matter. If men were selected to serve as elders in accordance with God's qualifications, most problems would be solved. Problems arise when men take matters into their own hands and select, or allow men to assume the position of an elder when they are clearly not what God has demanded to serve in that capacity.

If ever there was a time when those who love the Lord and His church should do everything within their power to improve the eldership within the church it is *now*. For multitudes who have been swept away from the truth it is too late. But no doubt there are many men who could become qualified elders if only their love for God was strong enough to make that their goal. True spiritual growth and maturity are greatly needed within the church.

#### Concluding Thoughts

The foregoing has not been written to discourage men from becoming elders, but rather to encourage such, and to call attention to the great need for elders within the church. Godly elders constitute one of the greatest things which can be done to contribute to the well-being of the church. Men who have love for the truth and ability to become elders should think seriously of their duty and opportunity to serve the Lord in this most important way.

Over the past several years a great many preacher training schools have been started. Some have done much good. But I am amazed that so little has been done to train men to become qualified elders. Young men, from early on, should be encouraged to prepare themselves to serve as elders in the Lord's church as well as preachers. Yes, God's Plan For Elders In The Church will work.

—Walter W. Pigg