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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 putting 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...
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 by this, 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 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 people select the best men 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

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 such be members of their congregation.” 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.

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“Those ye may be fellowhelpers to the truth” (3 John 8).

Our sincere thanks for making our work possible. Every contribution of any kind is indeed greatly appreciated. May this serve as a personal note of thank for every contribution. 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.

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 continuously fruitful life in His service. In Christ love—Ralph & Nancy Hammert.” — AL. (Your encouraging words are greatly appreciated. Also, thank you 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. It is 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 Talbot.”— TC. (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. B.O.T. is helpful.—Editor).

Address Changed? Let us know!
How would you answer this “puzzled” man’s question? It’s a fair one. Does the Bible give no hard answer, rather only a warning against doing that which cannot be identified?

“Drunkenness” comes from the noun μεθησίς (metheis) which Thayer says is “akin to methe, wine; perhaps any intoxicating drink” (p. 395). We rightly translate this word with “drunkenness” or “intoxication.” In either case, reference is to a state which is induced by imbibing an intoxicating drink. There is no issue or question of quantification here.

Just like healthiness is a state brought about by doing things that are healthful, so drunkenness is a state induced by the act of drinking (Gr. μεθησίς). Mr. Vine calls this an “inceptive” verb (A-F, p. 341). This means that drinking is the beginning of the state called “drunkenness.” Whether you think in terms of beginning, middle, or end, the person engaged in the act of drinking is in the state called drunkenness. It is analogous to the state called “fornication.” This state may be thought of in terms of a beginning and a consummation; but the sinful state, fornication, is not minimized, and certainly not eliminated, by attempts to measure or quantify the action that produces the state. One might as well say, “Touch, handle, fondle, grope, and paw, but don’t fornicrate!” as to say, “Drink, sip, imbibe, swell, “chugalug,” but don’t get drunk.”

Let us be honest with God, His Word, and ourselves. Taking refuge in the foxhole of ambiguity may get you by for the moment, but it will come back to haunt you: eventually in this life (cf. Rom 1:27; 32), and most certainly in the judgment to come (Heb 12:48-50). To “set at nought [God’s] counsel” is a grievous sin (1653 Pine Lane Dr., Cantonment, FL 32533)

Agony

The Spirit says the christian life is a “race” (Heb 12:1), and that work is our translation of a form of a Greek word παθήσω (pathesō) which in ABC’s looks like agonos. The root of this Greek word is the origin of our word “agony.” Agony is all about pain, anguish, and struggle. So then, we have “set before us” an “agony.” Now, that’s interesting.

It’s good to look at the different ways a word and its “cousins” are translated. Jesus talks about “striving [agonizing]” to “enter in at the strait gate” (Lk 13:24). He was “in an agony” when he prayed in the garden (22:44). Paul speaks of “the conflict [agony] which ye saw in me” (Phil 1:30). A literal translation of “fight the good fight” would be “agonize over the good agony” (1Tim 6:12).

When I think about the things I sometimes “agonize” over: going to Wal-Mart; putting on a shirt and tie; deciding what I want to eat—God Almighty, forgive me! We will agonize to make our bodies trim; agonize as we press ourselves in the mirror; agonize to get an education; agonize to get good jobs; agonize over overtime; agonize over making time for fun. But, I don’t think it’s an overtatement to say that we just do not use a lot of agonizing about getting to Heaven. We’d better be getting that way. It is the struggle and agony by which our Father “molds” and “makes” us. No pain, no gain.

In the qualifications, one man must “not be given to wine,” but two of them could be. At least one of the three must not be: “a brawler,” “covenant,” “a novice,” “self willed,” “soon angry,” etc., but two of these two could be lacking in these qualifications. It is indeed difficult to imagine people holding such an outrageous view as this, but there are many things difficult to imagine which are nonetheless matters of fact anyway. God’s word gives no credence to such a wild idea.

Elders Called by Another Name

In these and in a number of other areas, it is necessary to make a judgment as to whether or not a man meets the God-given qualifications. If a congregation requires absolute perfection in all the qualifications, this could account for an absence of elders. It should be pointed out, however, that since perfection cannot be expected, this does not mean that qualifications can just be ignored, as in some times the case.

In each of the four cases discussed above, the congregation involved is without elders completely, or without elders who are qualified according to God’s standards. This is indeed a most serious matter since God’s Plan For His Church does include qualified elders. Needless to say, we are now seeing the frightening results of the lack of qualified leadership.

But, not only are the qualifications of elders often ignored, there are other problems with regard to other matters concerning God’s plan for elders.

II. Other Unscriptural Ideas Relative To Elders

One familiar case involved a man who was serving as an elder. When the eldership was dissolved, he wanted to continue to exercise his authority as an elder. He was not trustworthy and had a bad reputation in the community. He tried to interfere with the work of the congregation to the extent that it was necessary in the face of his inimicement to withdraw fellowship from him. Since it is possible for a man
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 this to continue 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 be 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 flock, 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 this 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 13:1-7: “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” (1 Thess. 5:12). Elders are to take the “oversight” over the “flock of God” (1 Pet. 5:2). Paul says: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour...” (1 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 the elders were right in their scheme because they were “Holy Spirit appointed.”

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” (Gk. 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 relative and equivocality kick in. Our own language can’t even decide. We have “not drunk,” “‘sober,” “drunk,” “pass,” “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 un-desirable 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 his morose and sobering as it pertains to the question of drinking:

Evans Hard-shell Baptist church was not then ready to take a stand against whiskey. When Menor Graham, the schoolmaster, joined the temperance movement, the church trustees suspended an-"
Absurdities In Religion

Have you ever wondered why people who are lev- eleheaded 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 hypothetical, it is absurd.

In an article entitled “Two Episcopalians Discuss Gay Clergy,” in the Oct. 26, 2004, issue of The Pulpit Sun, we find a prime example of Absurdi- ties In Religion. The following statement was from Eva Mutham in her support of Robinson, a homo- sexual, 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 up- rightness 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 be- lieve 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 Ro- mans 1 and I Cor. 6:9-11?

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ensamples to the flock” (1 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 congrega- tion went to court to force the elders to make avail- able to the congregation the finances of the con- gregation. The elders maintained that they had authority to keep the information from the mem- bers. 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 lack- ing. 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 sev- eral 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, over in order to question us about a number of...
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 Bible, one must have his way in everything. Stubborn.

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

ARDS. (Tit. 1:6). Not one who is not in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re- ceives Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, one who re-ceive...
Courage and Obedience

Brock Harrington

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 his 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 will good their strength do us?

When the storm was at its worst and the disciples feared for their lives, they awaked 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?

Are we not all at times influenced by our environment, by the words of our enemies, by the urging of our flesh?

Mary Baker, in her hymn, expresses these feelings perfectly. In a world where the secular and the spiritual seem to be at odds, it is easy for us to lose sight of what is truly important.

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.

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 this 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 congregational 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

Tower of Babel

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.

As rulers of the congregation, the elders “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 spiritual death.

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.

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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 to not func
tion properly, the Devil will be successful in bring-
ging great hurt and lack of progress upon the con-
gregation. We shall note a few things which are happen-
ting today due to the eldership crisis. All of 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 con-
gregation.

VI. Evidence Of Eldership Crisis

lack of proper teaching. A primary duty of el-
der is to see the flock is properly fed. But in gen-
eral 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 meet-
ning 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 cer-
tainly 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 mem-
bers inform themselves in this area but elders are too busy to keep informed, are just too busy to be elders.

Fellowship with error is allowed. If the New Testament teaches anything, it teaches that faith-
ful Christians cannot fellowship error. Yet, mem-
bers may have fellowship with very liberal con-
gregations with no rebuke from their elders who are supposed to "watch" for their souls. An-
nouncements of activities of liberal congregations are some times made by those claiming to be

false teaching is tolerated. Some elders, seem-
ingly thinking that if nothing is said the false teaching will simply go away, do 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 mem-
bers 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.

Unqualified 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 re-
lationship. Whereas it is not difficult to "submit"
to elders in a church, it is necessary to serve in that capacity. It is a sad day when elders do not keep promises, or state things which are not true. This should never happen, but unfor-
tunately it does. I know.

The Solution To Eldership Problems. We have noted a number of problems and others could be men-
tioned. 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 de-
manded to be the case.

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 spiri-
tual growth and maturity are greatly needed within the church.

Concluding Thoughts

The foregoing has not been written to discour-
age men from becoming elders, but rather to en-
courage 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 quali-
fied elders. Young men, from early on, should be
encouraged to prepare themselves to serve as el-
ders in the Lord’s church as well as preachers.
—Malcolm W. Pegg