

Monday, September 4, 2017 – The Selection of Elders

I often receive e-mails asking questions regarding qualifications for elders in the Lord's church. All examples we are given in scripture show that each church (Titus 1:5) appointed men who met the scriptural qualifications listed for us in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

It is God's intention that every congregation of the church of Christ should appoint qualified elders to oversee and shepherd the church. To further support this understanding we are given, in the New Testament, numerous examples of established congregations that had appointed elders. We know, for example that the church in Jerusalem had appointed elders (Acts 11:30; 15:2; 21:15-18). We know also that the church in Ephesus had appointed elders (Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 3:1-8; 5:1, 17, 19). Paul instructed Titus, whom he had left on the island of Crete, to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). We know also that there were elders in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13), and in Philippi (Philippians 1:1). We know that it was the consistent practice of Paul to appoint elders in every church that he had helped to establish (Acts 14:23). So also, when Peter wrote to the Christians who had been scattered by persecution, whom he referred to as the "pilgrims of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia," he included a special encouragement to the elders among them (1 Peter 5:1-4).

It is, furthermore, God's clear intention that there should be more than one elder in each congregation. We know that the church in Jerusalem had a plurality of elders overseeing the work of the church there (Acts 15:2, 6), as did also the church in Philippi (Philippians 1:1), and Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:12), and Ephesus (Acts 20:17) and so on. We know that Paul commanded Titus to appoint elders

(plural) in every city (Titus 1:5), and Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (plural) in every church (Acts 14:23).

The eldership is a desired duty. This is clearly seen in 1 Timothy 3:1 when Paul states, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." It is a duty and a work that a man may aspire to hold. Interestingly, the Greek word, *orégomai*, translated as "aspires" means to *stretch* towards; (figuratively) strongly inclined to (pulled towards); aspire to; desire to *attain* (*acquire*), reach to. Therefore, It takes effort on the part of the man desiring the office to stretch himself to his full abilities to live Christ-like in this present age. His spiritual maturity **MUST** be above the average Christian; shown in both the way he lives and conducts himself.

The first qualification, the desire of the office, is, in my opinion, the most difficult for a man because it requires an individual with the ability of personal introspection. Too many men view the role of an elder in the same way they view a political office or secular title/office. This could not be further from the truth.

The writer of Hebrews says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" 13:17). Elders have the oversight of the congregation. Elders are to look after the spiritual life of the Christian as a shepherd looks after his sheep. If Christians obey and submit to the elders, their work shall be a joy. If not, the elders' work will be grief. Elders desire that Christians live faithful lives. They must do all they can to assist and guide Christians. Elders will give account of their work before God.

In order for a man to be an elder he must be able to lead

with moral authority. Moral authority is authority premised on principles, or fundamental truths, which are independent of written, or positive, laws. As such, moral authority necessitates the existence of and adherence to truth. In our discourse, we are talking about adherence to God's word, The Truth. Qualifications for an elder, listed in the scriptures referenced above, are Truth and in order for a man to be an elder HE MUST meet those qualifications in reality, not in his mind.

Let me provide for you an example.

My father was an elder until I was 16 years old. During this time, 3 of the other men who were elders with him had children, still living at home, who were caught up in alcohol, drugs and/or sexual promiscuity. In addition, they were in trouble with the law. What is one of the main qualifications to be an elder?

Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, "one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)..." The training ground for an elder is in the home.

One that ruleth well his own house; Ruleth is from *proistemi*, which, according to Vine, means literally "to stand before," and thus "to attend to (indicating care and diligence) and hence "is translated to rule...." Joshua could speak for his house: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Jos. 24:15). God said, concerning Abraham: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him..." (Gen. 18:19). The man that is ruled by his wife should not be appointed as an elder. Brethren should observe the wife and children of a prospective elder. Do they respect him? Do those who know him best regard him as

competent in this regard? Having his children in subjection with all gravity-His children are to be in submission to his will which correlates to God's will. The children are to exhibit that seriousness and sobriety of conduct, which is in accordance with their father's position.

The man who fails at home will surely fail in public. The man who shows inability to guide his own house certainly could not guide the church. A man's rule or management of his own family demonstrates his ability or inability to help rule the church. A man who is being considered for the eldership is to be the head of a well-governed family.