

# Elders and Preachers

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A debilitating problem among some churches of Christ in this generation is the lack of respect for and the appointment of elders to serve in local churches. The practice of using "Business Meetings" to oversee and direct the work of the local church to the neglect of selecting qualified men to serve as elders has been on the increase for more than 40 years. Until scriptural teaching is done and attitudes change, the situation will continue to deteriorate toward unscriptural governments in churches of Christ.

Additionally, the qualifications for preachers for local work are reduced to three: *A young man; a good personal worker; a pleasing speaker who does not offend people.* Such is the preacher who will likely get the job, but he will do no one any good in the sight of God. There will be little or no spiritual growth in that congregation. All this, of course, is based upon a misconception of the nature and work of the church, and the role of Christians in this world. Jesus said to his disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth . . . Ye are the light of the world . . ." (Matt. 5:13-14). That is a powerful influence upon the world of sin and darkness. Jesus describes the state of having no power (salt) in our lives thusly, "But if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men." Mark says of salt: "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltiness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another" (Mark 9:50).

Of the light of the world, Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Since Jesus is the light of the world, our light to shine before men reflects the image of the Son of God in our lives. That is the reason men will "see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

I believe most members of the church today have lost sight of the purpose of the church, and the role of gospel preaching in the salvation of the lost of the world. The church is not a political party, nor a social agency for its members, nor a dating and marriage bureau for young people. It is not an entertaining organization. The church was built by Jesus Christ as a body of people redeemed by his blood. It is to glorify God by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end (Eph. 3:21).

The church is the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus. Christ built the church that belongs to him. It contains all the saved in this dispensation. It is not denominational in nature. It began on the first Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. It began in Jerusalem in fulfillment of prophecy. It is organized as a local body of saved people who are totally amenable to the law of Christ, with saints, elders and deacons (Phil. 1:1). The church has three divine missions: support the gospel, care for its own needy, and edify itself (Eph. 4:12,16). Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12).

Men and women must quit trying to make something of the church that Christ did not intend for it to be. It is not the mission of the church to try to please the people of the community so they will attend and become members. It is not the mission of the church to please the members so they will

keep coming. It is the mission of the church to glorify God by Christ in every sense of the word. The church is the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). This means that the gospel of Christ, God's power to save (Rom. 1:16), must be preached in its fullness and power to sinners to convert them to Christ, and to saints to strengthen them in the faith.

The preacher, therefore, who will do the church good and accomplish the mission of Christ is the one who with singleness of heart preaches the pure gospel of Christ without compromise. He must "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). He must watch "in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). He must "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

If he is more interested in money than in preaching the gospel, he will do whatever it takes to appeal to the church where the money is. If he is interested in building a reputation as a "pleasing preacher" who wants many "meetings," he will make his pitch in that direction. If he wants a secure job where the people want little entertaining sermons, where he does not have to do too much studying, that is where he will wind up. If, however, he loves the gospel of Christ, and wants to convert people to Christ, he will study hard to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and that is what he will preach, in season, and out of season. People will learn the truth and obey it. Those who do not want to be faithful and obedient to the word of God will not like this kind of preaching. They did not like it in New Testament days, and they do not like it today.

If churches want these soft spoken, entertaining preachers, they will find them. There are many of them looking for a church who wants their wares. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). This has happened in the past and it will happen again. Those who do not want the full gospel will resist every effort to secure a man who is dedicated to the gospel of Christ without compromise.

When the time comes to locate a preacher to work with the congregation, you will hear the call for certain kinds of men whose qualifications sound more like a politician for some popular office than the qualifications of a gospel preacher. They want a "young man" who will be good with the young people. What do they want the young people to know and do that the "old" people do not need to know and do? There is not one word in all the word of God that makes the gospel appeal more important to one age level over another. It is as important to preach the gospel to an old woman as it is to a young girl. *Nothing more or less than the gospel of Christ will save a soul: any soul!* I am inclined to believe that some parents want such a preacher to correct the mistakes they have made through the years with their children, or they want him to entertain their children while he "makes them religious" in the process as they mature. Actually this is the responsibility of parents and must not be pushed off on the preacher or anyone else to raise their children. A gospel preacher must please God and persuade men. "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

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