

# Evangelistic Oversight

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Most of the inspired letters written by the apostle Paul warn about men perverting the word of God and trying to change the organization, work and worship of the church. It seems that men cannot keep their unholy hands off the divine arrangement given by Christ. The church during the first century had problems with elders and preachers, and by the sixth century the problem evolved into the papal system. The word of God is clear, precise and complete in regard to the church and its work.

Words are vital to the communication between God and man, and between man and man. Understanding the words is essential to receive the true meaning of the speaker or writer. The use of nebulous, misleading terms indicates the intent to deceive. Over the past forty years several words have been invented to convey religious ideas that are not in the word of God. Some Bible words have been redefined to communicate and establish a false doctrine. An example in the divorce and remarriage issue is "adultery" which has been redefined in an effort to prove that one can divorce his spouse for a cause other than fornication, and many another with the approval of God. This deceitful use of scriptures may be duplicated dozens of times with both erring brethren and denominational preachers.

"Evangelistic Oversight" simply means *preacher rule*. It denotes the full oversight of a local church in the hands of the preacher. This *preacher oversight* is practiced in many places where it is denied.

Evangelistic Oversight is really a misnomer; it is a contradiction of terms. The New Testament does not authorize an evangelist to have oversight over anything pertaining to the church. His work is to preach the gospel. Understanding these terms may help us know the truth about the oversight of the local church.

The word *evangelist* means: "euanglists, lit., a messenger of good (eu, well, angelos, a messenger), denotes a preacher of the Gospel, Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11, which makes clear the distinctiveness of the function of the churches; 2 Tim. 4:5." (W. E. Vine, page 44).

Webster says of *evangelism*: "The promulgation of the gospel; evangelical preaching." *Evangelistic*: "Pertaining to an evangelist or to his labors; evangelical."

*Oversight*: "episkopeo, lit, to look upon (epi, upon,. skopeo, to look at, contemplate), is found in 1 Pet 5:2 (some ancient authorities omit it), 'exercising the oversight:' R.V. (A.V., 'taking ... '); 'exercising' is the right rendering; the word does not imply the entrance upon such responsibility, but the fulfilment of the duties. The word is found elsewhere in Heb. 12:15, 'looking carefully:' R.V." (W. E. Vine, page 152).

Any position that is perceived to have authority and power will attract many. Anyone who thinks he deserves the right to control the affairs of others will seek the justification to do so.

Even the apostles of Christ contended among themselves over who was the greatest and some sought positions of honor and power over the others in the kingdom (Matt. 20:20-21).

Jesus taught his apostles that they did not have a great one among them. "But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister" (Matt. 20:25,26). When power and supervision appears, many rush to fill the positions.

### *Oversight: Who And Where?*

From all quarters come those who claim the right to oversee or rule in some sense in local churches. Some employ the "majority rule" of business meetings. Some substitute "leaders" in the place of elders. Others use the "committee oversight" which is popular in some sections. The "preacher rule" in churches is more widespread than most of us realize.

In churches with no bishops, the preacher is usually in the position to take some leadership. Those who are more aggressive insist that they have divine authority to occupy the position of oversight when there are no elders. Some preachers are pushed into that position by members who do not want to take responsibility for any decision in matters pertaining to congregational activity.

Some elders ask the preacher to meet with them on a regular basis and participate with them in the oversight. In time he will become the only one to whom the congregation looks for direction, because the elders relinquish more and more of their work to him.

A young preacher, full of zeal and anxious to move ahead fast, will often get in front of the elders and take matters into his own hands. One of two things will happen: the elders will convert to the preacher's leadership and follow wherever he takes them; or the elders will teach him what the work of an evangelist is and insist that he perform that work or move on. Once a preacher gets into the position of rule in a congregation, he never wants to work with a church which has elders. He will do what is necessary to keep bishops from being appointed in that place.

Some preachers consider the eldership an unwanted, unnecessary work, and are heard to remark that they did not want to preach with a congregation that had elders. Some sarcastic, rebellious, self-righteous preachers in their disbelief deride the idea of a local church and elders (bishops) as overseers. Other say that any congregation who has elders is destined for problems and stagnation. Some elders are intimidated by the preacher and yield to his pressure for control. This will result in *Evangelistic Oversight*, and finally the annihilation of the church of the Lord if carried to its logical conclusion. Several years ago two preachers, older than I, said in my presence that "Elders are a hindrance to the church; the church does not need them. I do not want to work where there are elders." I believed then, and I believe now, that these men do not love and respect the word of God regarding the organization of the church. This lack of love and respect for divine truth is what produces the various denominational concepts found in churches of Christ. Some elders have had very little encouragement from some preachers in our time.

Now what comes of this abuse of scripture? The first thing is teaching something that is wrong. Paul warned the Ephesian elders about the consequences of not watching the flock: wolves would enter in among them and destroy the flock. They were to "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

Some preachers ignore the elders and their work and proceed to do as they please. They often enlist members to side with them and against the elders for no reason except that they want to run things as they please.

In some cases preachers have attempted to unseat the elders whom they could not control. Some have suggested that when a preacher moves to work with a congregation, he is automatically an elder because he does the work of elders. Of course, that is not so. Elders are made by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). That is done by the teaching of the Holy Spirit when one meets the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These are not the qualifications for preachers. His qualifications are not the same as those of bishops.

In many congregations across this country preachers are exercising the oversight in the place of elders. In a few incidents the preacher claims the divine right to rule over the elders. The word of God does not say one word about any preacher ever having the oversight of anything pertaining to the church. The apostles had oversight in all the churches, but not preachers. No passage in all the word of God teaches that an evangelist as such ever had the oversight of any person in the church, much less the whole congregation. The only group of men in the church ever assigned the oversight over a local church are the elders, selected and appointed according to the instructions given in the New Testament.

The modern dominations have a pastor, a bishop, a priest, and an overseer to rule in the local church. Of course, these denominations have organization above the local church and higher officers unknown to the word of God to direct the whole denomination. Preachers who seek the ruling position arrogate to themselves the position of *The Pastor* of the congregation. There are three reasons why preachers seek this position:

1. Elders are sometimes irresponsible and do not take the oversight. That leaves the work for someone else to do, and usually it is the preacher. Little by little he takes over the work, and when challenged by someone, he seeks to justify it by scripture.
2. In some places there are no men qualified to be elders. The leading members take over or the preacher thinks he must assume the oversight in order for the work to go on. He may be "appointed" by some member or members to take the oversight. Some of the most serious problems to arise in churches have been over trivial things that challenged the "assumed oversight" of some preacher or individual member. They have led to dividing the church in some cases.
3. The elders insist that the preacher take the leading part and make most decisions for them. They tell him their problems and ask him to help solve the problems. He is asked to select the

preachers for meetings, develop the class programs, select the teachers, plan the work of the local church, plan the financial operation of the church, and to generally do the other things that are necessary. In a relatively short time he is THE PASTOR and the elders become only figureheads. He will generally deny it, but it is true nonetheless. But the preacher has no more right to take the oversight than one of the elders' wives. Elders cannot appoint anyone to do their work of overseeing the flock where they are elders.

From *Scriptural Elders And Deacons*, page 36: "Among some of the extreme advocates of Evangelistic Oversight are those followers of Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett who continually and tediously dwell on 'The one-man Pastor System,' by which they mean the preacher who lives for any length of time and preaches regularly for one congregation."

What verse in the New Testament teaches Evangelistic Oversight? Where is the IDEA that an evangelist has the oversight of any part of the church? If it is not in the New Testament, by what authority does it occur?

### *Who Has Oversight In Local Churches?*

Elders (presbuterion), Pastors (poiman) and Overseers (episcopos) are terms used in the New Testament to signify the same group of men who are made overseers by the Holy Spirit, to feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28). These men were called ELDERS in Acts 20:17, and Paul said they were OVERSEERS in Acts 20:28). They are to take the oversight of the flock. which is the church. These men are to be qualified by the standard given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9, and to be ordained in every church and every city (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

The elders, not the preacher or any one else, are to oversee, rule and feed the flock which is among them. That limits the oversight to the local church, with no organic tie with any other congregation of disciples. Each local body of disciples is autonomous in government and function. The following passages specify the work of elders and no other on earth.

"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).

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5: 17).

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Pet. 5:2).

"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1).

The work of preachers is outlined in these verses, which contains nothing about oversight of anyone: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:13-16).

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