

The Biblical Concept of the Church

4. New Testament Organization

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Build Carefully

Since Jesus said, "I will build my church," we should let Him build His church by being careful how we build upon the foundation He has laid. In the Old Testament period strict guidelines were established for the tabernacle and priests; nothing was left to men to do as they pleased. The importance of following these guidelines is reflected in what the psalmist wrote, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

The same principle is true in the new covenant period. Although the new covenant's guidelines are very simple compared to the old covenant, there is still a building plan to follow. Paul wrote about this:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw - each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire I Corinthians 3:10-15

The reader should note that the building material can be divided into two classes: gold, silver, precious stones, and wood, hay, stubble. The first group can survive a fire test, the second cannot. The Christian's work[10] can fall into two groups, one group will survive and the other will not.

In light of the above, let us go to the Scriptures for God's plan for the church. Let the disciples learn from their Master Teacher how His church is to be built.

Brotherhood Concept

The church is a brotherhood, not a hierarchy. The hierarchy concept, a "ruling body of clergy organized into orders or ranks each subordinate to the one above" (Webster), has no place in a biblical church. Jesus told His disciples, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26; cf. Mark 10:42-44). He also warned them about the leaders of the Pharisees:

They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant, whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matthew 23:5-12

In summary, if we are all brothers and on the same level, no one should seek to *Lord* over other brothers, wear special clerical clothing, or give any impression is part of a special church leadership group.

The brotherhood concept means the disciples are brothers and sisters. We find many references to this in the New Testament: "Peter stood up among the brethren" (Acts 1:15); "Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved" (Philippians 4:1); "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ" (Colossians 1:2); and "holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call" (Hebrews 3:1). Peter wrote about "love of the brethren" (I Peter 1:22, 3:8) twice in his first epistle and "the brotherhood . . . your brotherhood throughout the world" (I Peter 2:17, 5:9). The term *brother* should also apply to the leadership, as we see Paul did when he wrote, "Tychicus . . . a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord" (Colossians 4:7). James wrote about "my beloved brethren" (James 2:5). The term *sister* is not used as frequently as brother in the New Testament, but it is used enough that we know it was a well accepted term. Both Paul and James wrote about "the brother or sister" (I Corinthians 7:15, James 2:15). Paul commended to the church at Rome "our sister Phoebe" (Romans 16:1). He also wrote the Corinthians about the right to be "accompanied by a sister as a wife" (I Corinthians 9:5).

An appropriate symbol of this brotherhood concept is the use of "preacher benches" instead of lofty chairs in meeting houses. Too often the church's leaders like to sit up front in lofty, high-back, cushioned chairs with armrests, while the rest of the church sit on benches. This is hardly a good brotherhood practice. It is too closely associated with the "high churches" that have a hierarchy and, in the author's opinion, should not be used in churches that seek to follow closely the biblical patterns.

In a brotherhood, all the disciples have work to do. We need to remember the parable of five, two, and one talents, "to each according to his ability." The man who was given the one talent did not make use of it, and it was taken away from him (Matthew 25:14-30). Paul wrote, "We exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all" (I Thessalonians 5:14).

We all have work because of the gifts God bestowed on each of us, and we must be faithful in the exercise of our talents. We should not compare ourselves with others in the brotherhood or complain about or be jealous of another's work. We must remember Paul's admonition that

every one among you [is] not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them; if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3- 8)

Paul wrote the Corinthian church, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (I Corinthians 12:21). Thus individuals in the church do not all have the same functions or gifts. We should respect one another's gifts and work together so all brethren make maximum use of their gifts.

The brotherhood concept means there are no classifications within the church; there is no clergy and laity classification within the body of Christ. Most churches make such distinctions, but this practice has no biblical basis. Only brothers and sisters exist within the church; clergy and laity distinctions should not exist. These latter terms are not New Testament concepts; their origin and use belongs to church history. G. W. Bromiley wrote in the article on "Laity" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* that "from *laos* ("people"), the laity ought strictly to denote whole people of God. Historically, however, it has come to be used of those who are not specifically ordained to the ministry (clergy). The distinction is particularly marked in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, with a strong emphasis on the fact that the duty of the laity is to be taught, to obey, and to make financial contributions." [11]

Elders: General

The New Testament contains many references to church organization, and from these we can understand God's will for the church today. In general, the church organization is very simple, with "elders and deacons" serving as her leaders. Elders were part of the church from its very start. Luke mentions elders at Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22; 21:18), that "they had appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23), and elders being in the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17). Thus elders existed throughout the early church.

The Greek term translated elder is *presbyteros*. The elders were the mature brethren who were the servant/leaders in the local church. This term and the term *bishop* are synonymous and represent one office. Bishop comes from the Greek term *episkopos*. J. H. Thayer wrote in his lexicon, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, that the term meant "an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things are done by others are done rightly, and curator, guardian, or superintendent." [12]

J. B. Smith explained the relationship between the *bishop* and *elder* terms by stating that "during the entire New Testament period there were recognized officials and representatives of the church. *Elder* was the official title, while *bishop* (Greek: overseer) was the function." [13]

The terms *bishop/elder* were used interchangeably by Luke when he wrote about Paul sending for the Ephesian elders to come to Miletus. Paul told these elders that "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [footnote: bishops], to shepherd the church of God" (Acts 20:17, 28 NASV), thus addressing this one group by both terms. We see this too in Paul's writing to Titus: "appoint elders. . . For a bishop" (Titus 1:5, 7).

Elder is a Jewish synagogue term. Because many of the early Christians had a Jewish background or were proselytes, they were familiar with this term and therefore it was unnecessary for the New Testament writers to define the term *elder*. Christians knew the elders had teaching and ruling duties

within the congregation.

The Old Testament priesthood was not carried over into the New Testament period (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14; 5:5; 7:10-23, v. 26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21). The term *priest* is never applied to a church leader. The Law on which it was based was abolished (Hebrews 7:12, 18-22; 8:7-13). Under the new covenant there was only one priest, the High Priest Jesus Christ. All members of the body of Christ can approach God through their High Priest, Jesus Christ, without any man being in-between (Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:18).

Peter did use the term *priesthood*, but he applied it to the whole body of believers and not just to a group of church leaders. He wrote, "Be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood" (I Peter 2:5), and "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (I Peter 2:9). This application of the term to the whole body of believers follows the Old Testament concept of the people of Israel being God's "own possession among all peoples . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5, 6; cf. Isaiah 61:6)

. Only once is another term, the shepherd-sheep based *pastor* term, used for the church's leadership. Paul used the term in Ephesians to describe the same function as elders: "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11, 12). The structure of this sentence ("some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers") indicates the "pastors and teachers" are one and the same group. The Greek term translated *pastors* is *poimen*, and is translated *shepherd* in the other sixteen places it is used in the New Testament.[14] The pastor-related verb "shepherd" and noun "flock" are used elsewhere (I Corinthians 9:7; Acts 20:28). The pastors are to "shepherd" their "flocks" by providing good spiritual food for them; i.e., by teaching them. Peter wrote that elders are to "tend the flock of God" (I Peter 5:2).

The contemporary practice of using this term to signify the one *pastor* over a church is not a biblical concept. As we have seen, there were always elders serving the local church. Paul used *pastors* and elders to signify the same group.

Today the term *minister* is also commonly used to describe church leaders. This Greek term was used in the early church, but its use was not limited to the local church leadership. The Greek terms translated *minister*, *ministry*, etc., in the New Testament were applied to apostles, prophets, evangelists, deacons, elders and teachers, and all members of the church (Acts 1:17, 23; 6:4; 20:24; 21:19; Romans 11:13; I Corinthians 12:5; II Corinthians 3:6; 4:1; 6:3; Ephesians 3:7; 4:12; Colossians 1:7, 25; 4:7; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 4:5).

The church's ministry is not the work of the elders alone. Paul wrote to the Ephesian church that "grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Ephesians 4:7). These gifts meant that the leaders worked "for the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:12 NKJV). That all have a part in the ministry is emphasized also in the letter to the Colossians. "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ," Paul wrote, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom" (Colossians 1:2; 3:16). This teaching and admonishing is a work of ministry. Let us look at this ministry in more detail.

Ephesians 4:12, when examined more closely reveals the purpose of ministry. R. C. H. Lenski, in his commentary on Ephesians, points out that "Paul's meaning is obscured by the punctuation of our versions. . . . This happens when the text is regarded as consisting of three coordinate phrases." Three coordinate phrases stress that the gifts given to leaders have three somewhat separate functions: (1) to equip the saints, (2) for the work of ministry, and (3) for building up the body of Christ. If one follows this interpretation, Lenski points out, the work of Christian ministry takes a second place. It also breaks the connection between the first and third phrases and "leaves the second

hanging in the air with nothing being said about it." If the second and third are tied together, "the ministry alone builds the church."

If one omits the commas, the gifts are seen to be "for equipment of the saints for the work of the ministry for building up the body," that is, the church.

Concerning this sentence structure, Lenski writes, "The second phrase depends on the first, the third on the second, the whole is a unit. Paul cannot say that the leaders alone build up the church after having so emphatically said that 'to each single one of us' Christ's grace has been given. . . . The saints are to be perfectly, completely fitted out by all those in the church who are able to transmit the Word."

Lenski writes further that "all saints are to be engaged in a work of ministration. Note the absence of articles. This is not the Christian ministry as some have thought. It is a task of ministering to each other, for 'ministry' signifies a service rendered to benefit others. All saints have this blessed work to do." [15] The goal of this ministry is the "building up the body of Christ . . . unity . . . knowledge" (Ephesians 4:12, 13).

As mentioned earlier, the above interpretation is supported by Paul's instructions to the Colossians that the saints are to "teach and admonish one another" (Colossians 1:1, 2; 3:16).

The elders are to minister and be servants in the church and not "to be her masters." Jesus told His disciples that they knew "the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28). They are to be the guardians of the church and not her lords. We see this in Luke's writings about how Paul "called to him the elders of the church. . . . Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord" (Acts 20:17, 28). The KJV uses *overseers* instead of *guardians*

. The elders should be highly respected by the brotherhood. As Paul recognized that Timothy was "doing the work of the Lord" (I Corinthians 16:10), the members of the church today should recognize that their elders are doing the same thing.

Preachers and Teachers

Most elders are to be preachers and teachers. Apparently not all elders carried out these duties, because Paul wrote, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching" (I Timothy 5:17). Tying "preaching and teaching" together suggests this work is done by the same individual. And as we mentioned earlier, Paul tied "pastors and teachers" together in his epistle to the Ephesian church (Ephesians 4:11, 12), again indicating that these two are one and the same group.

The importance of teaching in the church is emphasized several times in the New Testament. Luke wrote that "in the church at Antioch there were . . . teachers" (Acts 13:1). Paul wrote to the Romans, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: . . . he who teaches, in teaching" (Romans 12:6, 7); to the Corinthians, "And God has appointed in the church . . . third teachers" (I Corinthians 12:28); to the Galatians, "him who teaches" (Galatians 6:6). And to Timothy, Paul wrote "what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2), they are to be "apt teachers" (II Timothy 2:24), and are to "preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their

own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths" (II Timothy 4:2-4). The ministry of teaching is to be one of the central duties of church leadership.

The elder "must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). Later Paul reminded Titus to "teach what befits sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). They should always remember "'the word of the Lord abides for ever.' That word is the Good News which was preached to you" (I Peter 1:25). Elders are to hold to the word so they can teach sound doctrine; the word and doctrine have basically the same content.

Paul charged Timothy to teach "in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience" (I Timothy 1:18, 19). Earlier Paul wrote him "that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine." These different doctrines were not "divine training that is in faith." These men who taught them, "desiring to be teachers of the law," were "without understanding" (I Timothy 1:3-7).

The writer of the Book of Hebrews told his readers that they had "become dull of hearing." Then he stated, "By this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God's word" (Hebrews 5:11, 12). Those who learn about God's Word should be able to teach others. But this does not mean that all should become teachers, for as James wrote, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren" (James 3:1).

In their teaching they should not fall into intellectualism, that is, the "devotion to the exercise of intellect or intellectual pursuits" (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*). They should seek to clearly teach Bible doctrine and practices and follow the patterns clearly taught in the New Testament books. These books were written in common, everyday language, without using a heavy intellectual-theological approach. The language of the New Testament is Koine Greek, the language of the common people. It was not written in the classical Greek literary language, giving us additional evidence that spiritual truth should be expressed in the common, everyday language of the people.

Women Teachers Outside The Assembly

Women are instructed that they could teach too, but only if it is done outside the assembly and does not involve teaching men. Paul gave instructions that "older women . . . are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children" (Titus 2:3, 4). Since Paul did not allow women to speak in the assemblies ("the women should keep silence in the churches," I Corinthians 14:34), this instruction was done in private. Their teaching was limited to other sisters, as Paul wrote that he permitted "no woman to teach or to have authority over men" (I Timothy 2:11).

We find in Acts that "He [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Priscilla went with Aquila when he instructed Apollos. She likely did not teach him. They were with Paul (Acts 18:5) and surely knew he did not allow women to teach men (I Timothy 2:11). Also this instruction definitely did not occur in the assembly. "They took him" implies the instruction was done elsewhere, privately. Thus no one should twist this Scripture to mean that women taught in the church assembly.

Paul sent a greeting to Priscilla and Aquila, writing they were "my fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3). He also sent greetings in the second letter to Timothy (4:19). Thus they must have been faithful to Paul's teachings, and therefore she would not have taught brethren.

Women have made strong contributions to the church. An example is Timothy. Apparently he was taught by his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice (II Timothy 1:5). Paul reminded him of this:

"Continue in what you learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:14, 15).

Exhortation

The second thing church leaders are to do is to exhort the disciples, that is, to encourage and urge the church on to higher ground. We find the apostles constantly doing this, and they told the church leaders and members to do it also. At the first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, after Peter called for his hearers to repent and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, Luke wrote, "He testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation'" (Acts 2:40). This exhortation was nothing new. Luke wrote that John the Baptist "with many other exhortations, [he] preached good news to the people" (Luke 3:18). It was a practice also carried out in the synagogues. At Antioch, Paul was told after the reading of the law and the prophets in the synagogue, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it" (Acts 13:15).

When the Jerusalem conference letter was received at Antioch, the congregation was gathered together, and "they delivered the letter. And when they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation" (Acts 15:30, 31). At the end of his visit to the Ephesians, "Paul sent for the disciples and having exhorted them took leave of them" (Acts 20:1).

When we examine Paul's record, we find him constantly exhorting the disciples and wanting other leaders to do the same. He appealed and wrote to the Thessalonians to remember how he, "like a father with his children, exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (I Thessalonians 2:11). He later wrote, "Brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more" (I Thessalonians 4:1). At the close of this book he wrote, "we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you. . . . And we exhort you, brethren" (I Thessalonians 5:12-14). In his second letter to this church, he wrote to those who were idle and not willing to work: "such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living" (II Thessalonians 3:12).

This was not the sole responsibility of the apostles to admonish and reprove erring ones, but also the duty of other church leaders. Paul wrote to Timothy after giving instructions on slave-master relations, "Teach and urge these duties" (I Timothy 6:2). In his second letter to him, Paul wrote, "I charge you . . . preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching" (II Timothy 4:1, 2). To Titus he wrote, "Bid the older men . . . Bid the older women. . . . Likewise urge the younger men. . . . Bid slaves." Summing this all up he wrote, "Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority" (Titus 2:1-15).

Other New Testament writers gave the same emphasis. Peter exhorted the elders to "tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock" (I Peter 5:2, 3). Jude asked his readers "to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." He then warned his readers about "ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Their goal was to "convince some, who doubt; save some." (Jude 3, 4, 22, 23). The writer of Hebrews wrote at the close of his book, which contains many exhortations, "I appeal to you, brethren, bear with my word of exhortation" (Hebrews 13:22).

Although we are writing here about the responsibility of church leaders, these actions are not only for them but for all brethren. Paul stated concerning gifts, "Let us use them . . . he who exhorts, in his exhortation" (Romans 12:6, 7). The writer of Hebrews wrote, "Take care, brethren . . . exhort one another every day" (Hebrews 3:12, 13).

Qualifications

The desire to be an elder is a very serious one because the Lord will judge them with a stricter standard. James wrote, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1). So brethren must seriously examine their motives when they consider this office. They and the church should carefully consider if they have the qualifications.

Paul wrote to Timothy about the qualifications of elders. He stated,

The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. I Timothy 3:1-7

Later he wrote, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth" (II Timothy 2:24, 25). Paul wrote to Titus to

appoint elders in every town as I directed you, if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate. For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled; he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it. For there are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially the circumcision party; they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for base gain what they have no right to teach. Titus 1:6-11

As mentioned earlier, elders were mature brethren. The above qualifications mention about "keeping his children submissive" and "his children are believers." Both statements show that the elder would have older children, which implies they would be at least in their later thirties.

Some readers may believe that elders can be younger since Paul wrote to Timothy to "let no man despise thy youth" (I Timothy 4:12). There are two things wrong with this view. First, Timothy was not an elder in a local church; he was a representative of Paul. Second, in New Testament times *youth* referred to those between 14 and 40.[16]

Sometimes we think an elder must be first of all a strong speaker who will attract a following, but this was not the case in the New Testament church. We see this in Paul's example, when he wrote the Corinthian church, "I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in wisdom of men but in the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:3-5).

Today formal education is considered an important qualification for church leadership. Of course it is important for church leadership to be students of the Word, but this should not be equated with formal education. To make formal education a requirement for church leadership would not harmonize with the above statements. Paul said that his message was "not in plausible words of wisdom" or with his statements, "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" and "not many of you were wise

according to worldly standards" (I Corinthians 1:20-27).

The question of education need not become a major issue if the elders are chosen from the congregation because their education would reflect the level of education that exists within the church. Thus differences in education need not create barriers within the church.

If the education requirement is taken to mean that a seminary degree is required, or even desirable, then it is not a proper qualification. There is no biblical basis for seminary training and requiring seminary training has major implications on who and how elders are called. To earn a degree from a seminary, an individual has to choose early in life to pursue such an education. This means the individual must decide on the basis of his own "inner" call, which circumvents the call being made by the church.

The claim of an "inner" call to the ministry has often resulted in problems for the church. It can lead to individualism and result in one's asserting that they present the truth because he was directly "called" by God.

It may surprise some, but some individuals who obtain a seminary training do not always have the highest motives in obtaining such an education. Some do so because they view this as a way to obtain a leadership role over a church. Others do so because they are weak and unsettled individuals and are searching for answers. They enter a seminary in hope of finding answers there.

If seminary training is to be rejected, then one may ask, "Where should church brethren obtain their education?" The answer to this question is simple. They should obtain their Bible training from the local church. If we follow the biblical teaching of ordaining elders, ordaining the mature and older brethren, the brethren called would have had plenty of opportunity to be trained in church. If the elders are "apt teachers" (I Timothy 3:2; cf. II Timothy 2:24), and are like those Titus was told to appoint, holding "firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instructions in sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9), and if they teach as Paul told Timothy to "preach the word" (II Timothy 4:2) and Titus to "teach what befits sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1), brethren can obtain good training in the local church. And if they supplement this with self Bible study, brethren can become strong Bible students by the time the church calls them to the ministry.

In summary, there are qualifications for elders in the Bible and these should be followed. It will only cause problems in a church if they are ignored.

Women Not Elders

Sisters are not to serve as elders in the church. The Scriptures clearly indicate that only brethren are to serve. In speaking of those who aspire for the office of bishop, Paul noted that they must be "the husband of one wife . . . He must manage his own household well . . . for if a man does not know to manage his household . . ." (I Timothy 3:1-5). Paul wrote also to Titus about those appointed elders: "any man is blameless, the husband of one wife. . . he must not be arrogant . . . he must hold firm to the sure word taught, so that he may be able to give instructions" (Titus 1:5-9). As mentioned earlier, Paul wrote that he permitted "no woman to teach or to have authority over men, she is to keep silent" (I Timothy 2:12). Also, "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak. . . it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (I Corinthians 14:33-35). From these Scriptures it is obvious women should not serve as elders.

Some have become confused on this issue because Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the "woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled" (I Corinthians 11:5). This prophesying must not have occurred within the assembly. If this were not the case, this Scripture would contradict Paul's later statement that "women should keep silence in the churches" (I Corinthians 14:34). Also in the

following paragraph Paul wrote, "When you assemble as a church" (I Corinthians 11:18; cf. v. 20). This indicates he shifted his thoughts to the assembly: thus his earlier comments must not have been connected with the assembly.

There are Scriptures showing that women were active in the early church. Luke wrote that Dorcas "was full of good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36). Thus women had opportunities to help those in need. When Paul left Corinth to go to Syria, he took "Priscilla and Aquila" along. We later see them at Ephesus where they took Apollos "and expounded to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:18, 26). Priscilla was beside her husband and supported his work in the church. Later Paul referred to them, writing "Greet Prisca and Aquila . . . who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks; greet also the church in their house" (Romans 16:3-5) and "Greet Prisca and Aquila" (II Timothy 4:19). Thus Paul gave credit to her and greeted her too.

Luke wrote that Paul "entered the house of Philip the evangelist . . . [who] had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied" (Acts 21:8, 9). This statement does not state where the prophesying occurred. But since sisters could not prophesy in the church (women were to remain silent there, I Corinthians 14:34; I Timothy 2:12), they were not elders.

The apostles often took their wives along; in fact, Paul mentioned that only he and Barnabas seemed not to do so (I Corinthians 9:5). This gave these sisters more opportunities to serve and possible opportunities to teach women and children too. There is also evidence that churches sometimes met in sisters' homes. At least when Peter was miraculously released from prison, he went to "the house of Mary," John Mark's mother, and "many were gathered together and were praying" (Acts 12:12). A church met in Aquila and Prisca's house (I Corinthians 16:19) and in the home of Nympha (Colossians 4:15). Euodia and Syntyche "labored side by side with me [Paul] in the gospel together with Clement and others," (Philippians 4:2, 3). So there were opportunities for women to serve in the church, but this did not involve being elders.

Today some maintain that Paul's statement in Galatians, that there "is neither male nor female," indicates women can be in the ministry. But this Scripture does not speak to this issue. In context, this was written about the New Testament faith in relation to the Old Testament law. Paul noted the universality of the faith by writing that there was neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, and "there is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). This concerns the standing of the groups before God in relation to salvation and does not imply that these groups all have the same functions within the church.

If we examine Paul's other epistles that explain the relation of Jews to Gentiles, we will find this concerns "standings" and not "functions." Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the relation of the Gentiles to God's old covenant people. They were at one time "Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision . . . separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel." But now by the blood of Christ, He "has made us both one . . . created in himself one new man in the place of two . . . one body through the cross" (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Paul made the same emphasis in this epistle that he made in Galatians: we "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Yet this oneness does not change our relationship between some of these groups. It changes that of the Jew to the Gentile, but not the others. This is very evident in this book because Paul wrote, "Wives, be subject to your husbands" (Ephesians 5:22), and "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters" (6:5).

Paul wrote to the Colossians also about their having "put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature." He then stated, "Here there cannot be Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11). Again we have the same emphasis we find in the Galatian passage. This oneness in Christ does not

affect other relationships concerning our fellowship because he wrote, "Wives, be subject to your husbands. . . . Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters" (Colossians 3:18, 22; 4:21).

From these Scriptures we know can see that the Galatians passage about "neither female or male" does not mean our earthly relationships are done away with in Christ. Those who say there are no longer any differences between "female and male" in God's sight, and thus women can be elders, twist this passage and are wrong.

Types Chosen

Elders should have the same high motive Paul had, "for if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" His reward was to "make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of any right in the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:16, 18). Paul did everything possible to make the gospel known to all men. He wrote, "I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. . . . I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (I Corinthians 9:19-23).

Only those who follow Paul's example of not being "like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned of God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ" (II Corinthians 2:17) should be considered for an elder position. They should have the highest motives and have "renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways" and "refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word" (II Corinthians 4:2). Paul wrote that "some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment" (Philippians 1:15-17).

Elders should set an example that others can learn how they "ought to live and to please God" (I Thessalonians 4:1). As Paul charged Timothy, they should "keep the commandment unstrained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Timothy 6:14). They should "not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God" (II Timothy 1:8). They should be ready to teach and "follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us" (II Timothy 1:13, 14).

Those who serve as elders should "tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly" (I Peter 5:1-3). They should be willing to work hard, as Paul did: "For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those at Laodicea" (Colossians 2:1). Too often men have crept into the ministry for what they can get out of it. Great care should be taken to prevent this, and one of the best ways is to follow Paul's example of Christian liberty and not paying salaries. Salaries will be discussed later.

Paul realized that churches would not always look for the ideal qualifications. Not only would ministers err, but also groups within the churches. He wrote that church members "having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings and will turn away from listening to the truth" (II Timothy 4:3, 4).

How Chosen

Jesus left an example that all should follow: "Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him [God]" (Hebrews 5:5). If one follows His example, no one would seek to exalt himself. It is by God's grace and calling that one qualifies for this servanthood position. As

Paul wrote, "I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power" (Ephesians 3:7). And to an elder, he wrote, "See that you fulfill the ministry which you have received in the Lord" (Colossians 4:17).

In his first epistle, Peter wrote, "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 4:10, 11). Everything must be done for God's glory and not for one's self.

The apostles and brethren, when they chose a twelfth apostle to replace Judas, left us an example the church can follow in choosing leaders. In the Book of Acts Luke explained how their choice was made. He first told how Peter stood up among the one hundred and twenty brethren when it was time to select this new apostle. The selection was going to be by lot, but first they had to select those who would be in the lot. This selection was left to the group, and was not made by the apostles alone, nor was it a matter of a brother stepping forward who claimed to have an "inner" calling to take the office.

Secondly, the qualifications for the office were reviewed. Then "they put forth two." Apparently they limited those going through the next process. If voting occurred, apparently not all who received scattered votes were accepted for the lot. To leave all who receive scattered votes would test the Lord by requiring Him to choose from a group which were not carefully selected.

Having the two selected, they next "prayed and said, 'Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship. . . . And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:15-26). By making the final selection by the lot, it became the Lord's choice, and not the prerogative of the members. A note of interest is that the Greek term for *lot* is *kleros*, from which the English term *clergy* comes. Let us consider the use of the lot in more detail.

Today the lot is viewed by many as an Old Testament practice that can be rejected. Some reject it because the selection of Matthias by lot was made before the Holy Spirit was given, and therefore thought it was a hasty and improper method of selection. But there are no grounds for this assertion. Jesus gave the disciples the Holy Spirit before Pentecost (John 20:19-22), and under the old covenant men were moved and guided by the Holy Spirit too (II Peter 1:21). Since these disciples had just spent forty days with the risen Lord (at which time they may have received instructions on the use of the lot) and prayed for guidance, the Lord was involved in their actions. Others say that Matthias's selection has proven to be improper because he is not mentioned again in the New Testament. But there are no grounds for this assertion. Although he is not mentioned, neither are most of the other apostles. There is positive evidence that his selection was proper; we find him numbered with the other eleven (for mention of the eleven apostles, see Matthew 28:16; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:9, 33) to bring the total to twelve (Acts 1:26; 2:14; 6:2). Besides the above reasons, there is not even the slightest hint in the New Testament that his selection was improper. Thus there are no grounds here for any objection to the lot. In the final analysis, perhaps the only motive for rejection of the lot is that today many men want to have complete control over selection of church leadership.

The lot should be accepted as a God-given method of choosing qualified men for church leadership, and it will work satisfactorily if the example in Acts 1 is followed. If the church carefully and prayerfully selects the candidates, the Lord can use the lot to make His will known. If this is not done, the lot can become a testing of the Lord and may result in unqualified persons entering the ministry.

There were times in the early church where elders were appointed. Luke wrote that Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey "appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23). Paul

also wrote to Titus to "appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). This early practice cannot be considered as a norm for the church today. Paul was an apostle and had a special commission and guidance from the Lord. Titus was a close companion of Paul and served as his assistant and personal representative. In the case involving Titus, they were together in Crete and when Paul left him there, he commissioned Titus to appoint elders in these newly emerging churches. Thus both of these New Testament examples of appointment of elders were carried out under direct apostolic authority. No one can claim this today.

Missionaries Appointed By The Church

The great commission to the church is "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Those who go to areas away from the local church should be sent out by the local body. The early church followed this practice. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out, it was the church that sent them. Luke wrote, "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 15:22). The same was true of Titus. He was "appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work which we are carrying on" (II Corinthians 8:19). We learn from Paul's letter to the Corinthians that he selected and accredited brethren to carry gifts to Jerusalem: "I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gifts to Jerusalem" (I Corinthians 16:3). These appointments did not involve ordination, but the sending out of already ordained brethren. This meant they did not go on their own but went at the direction of the local church.

Ordination

When brethren are called to serve as elders in the church, God through His grace gives them special gifts (Ephesians 4:7, 11), and they are ordained to set them apart for this service. This ordination occurs through the laying on of hands.

There are several accounts in Acts showing this. We see this when the apostles set apart the seven brothers to assist them, "they prayed and laid their hands upon them" (Acts 6:6). At the church in Antioch the Holy Spirit said, "'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2, 3).

Although ordination is not mentioned in the following passage, we find that when Paul returned from Derbe through Lystra and Iconium to Antioch, Luke wrote that "they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed" (Acts 14:23).

Paul wrote to Timothy about the charge he received at the time: "This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience" (I Timothy 1:18, 19). A little later in this book Paul again told Timothy, "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you. Practise these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (I Timothy 4:14-16). Paul also wrote, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor participate in another man's sins" (I Timothy 5:22). In a later letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (II Timothy 1:6, 7).

Although there is no direct, descriptive teaching about ordination and laying on of hands, we find the above Scriptures do show that this was the practice in the early church. Many times God has shown us the proper way by giving us a brief view of an early church practice. He did not leave us with a

formal thesis explaining what steps we should take today, but these brief descriptions are enough to show that we should be following this practice.

Support

Today the custom in most churches is to have a full-time, salaried clergy, but this is not following the biblical teachings. Before we explain why a salary is inappropriate for church leadership, let us first point out that "those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." Paul, as an early church missionary, wrote, "Do we not have the right to our food and drink? . . . Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?"

"Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.' . . . the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of a share in the crop. If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more?" (I Corinthians 9:4-12). A little later he wrote, "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:13, 14). Thus Paul argues forcefully for his right to support.

Paul does not stop with the above discussion but goes on to give us a good example to follow today in this area. He used his Christian liberty and did not make use of the right to be supported. He wrote to the Corinthians, "Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (I Corinthians 9:12). His goal was more noble than to be concerned about using this right. He wrote, "I would rather die than have any one deprive me of my ground for boasting. For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. . . . For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! . . . What then is my reward? Just this: that in my preaching I make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel. . . . I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (I Corinthians 9:15-23).

As Paul instructed Titus, "a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be . . . greedy for gain" (Titus 1:7). Their goal should be as Jesus instructed, since "You received without paying, give without pay" (Matthew 10:8). No one should ever think about gaining materially from his service. Jesus taught about the danger of hirelings. He said, "He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees. . . . He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep" (John 10:12, 13).

Paul did not seek gain or become a hireling. First, he stated, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me" (Acts 20:33, 34). He had very high motives for his preaching. He wrote, "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (I Corinthians 9:16). To do this he "worked night and day . . . not to burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God" (I Thessalonians 2:9). In his second letter to the Corinthians, in a question he mentioned that he "preached God's gospel without cost to" them (II Corinthians 11:7).

Paul also expected others to have this same high motive, but he recognized this was not always the case. To the church at Philippi he wrote, "Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment" (Philippians 1:15-17). He wrote to Timothy, whom he considered as a son, that

"There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. . . . For the love of money is the root of all evils But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness" (I Timothy 6:6-8, 10, 11). Church leaders, just as all brethren, should be models of contentment and should not love money.

At times it was necessary for Paul to accept some support, but when he did accept it, it generally came from churches other than the one he was starting. Because of the problems in the Corinthian church, he wrote them about this and wondered if he had done this right.

Did I commit a sin in abasing myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel without cost to you? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in want, I did not burden any one, for my needs were supplied by brethren who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. . . . For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! II Corinthians 11:7-10; 12:13

And he wrote to some in the Philippian church who had helped him:

You have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. . . . Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. . . . when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again; Not that I seek the gift; but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. Philippians 4:10-18

Paul did receive a rich reward for his service. He wrote that his reward was "that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel." He did this so that he would be "free from all men." Yet as he wrote, "I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more." After commenting about working to win those under the law and those outside the law, he wrote, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (I Corinthians 9:18-23).

Another reason for not having a salaried ministry is that there is no need for it when the biblical plural ministry is followed. The individual elders have plenty of time to make a living since the work load is spread among several brethren.

It is obvious that a biblically based church could not afford to support her several elders. Lenski, in commenting on I Timothy 5:18, wrote, "It is generally assumed that the elders were paid for their services in the apostolic churches. We are convinced that this assumption is not tenable. The probability is that none of them was paid. The elders of the synagogues were not paid or salaried. Each synagogue had a number of elders, too many to have a payroll that would be large enough to support them. The apostolic congregations imitated the synagogue in this respect. Our passage speaks of "'twofold honor,' not of twofold financial pay or salary." [17]

There is another danger of a fully supported ministry. If a minister is to serve full time, churches quickly think they need seminary-trained leaders. This can result in ministers not being qualified by the church and called by God's method but by the individual's own judgment to enter seminary. It also may result in a professionalism where the central issue is not how closely they teach and follow the Bible, but to follow those who control the monies. And it also makes it easier for churches to choose and control their leaders, that is, to "accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own

likings" (II Timothy 4:3, 4). In general, these ministers are not strong Bible scholars and the church suffers.

Even though a biblically based church will not have a fully supported ministry, these churches should not turn their backs on elders who have financial needs. The subject of church finances will be discussed in the church finances section, but let me emphasize here that the greatest commandment is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40, cf. Mark 12:29-31). Love will result in brethren sharing within the church. This sharing would include helping elders who have financial needs. Therefore, no elder should suffer because of financial needs, nor should the church suffer because their elders lack time to study the Word.

Prayer Support

The elders of the church need the prayers of the brothers and sisters, especially prayer when they face major trials. Peter, for instance "was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. . . . he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of prison" (Acts 12:5, 17). Prayers at other times are needed too. As Paul requested, "You also must help us by prayer" (II Corinthians 1:11); "Pray at all times . . . making supplications . . . for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel . . . that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:18-20); "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph" (II Thessalonians 3:1); "Brethren, pray for us" (I Thessalonians 5:25); and "pray for us" (Hebrews 13:18).

Paul did not request prayers just for himself, but he remembered other church leaders in his prayers. He wrote Timothy that "I remember you constantly in my prayers" (II Timothy 1:3). The elders in the church also have the responsibility to pray for the church as a whole. Paul gave us examples of praying for churches: "I give thanks to God always for you" (I Corinthians 1:4); "We pray God that you may not do wrong" (II Corinthians 13:7); "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" (Ephesians 1:16, 17); "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. . . . we have not ceased to pray for you" (Colossians 1:3, 9); "constantly mentioning you in our prayer" (I Thessalonians 1:2); "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren" (II Thessalonians 1:3); and "I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers" (Philemon 4).

Correcting Elders Who Err

The elders in the church, too, have experienced "the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5), and have received a special gift of grace, yet they are human and do sin. They, as all other members, are promised, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Yet there are several examples in the early church where the leaders failed to do this and fell away (I Timothy 1:6, 7; II Timothy 4:10).

Provisions are made for their discipline in these cases. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witness. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear" (I Timothy 5:19, 20). If two or more members of the church bring charges against an elder, action needs to be taken. No action is required if one brother makes a charge against an elder. They are to be free from accusations made by a single witness.

If two or three witnesses are available to prove the charge, and the erring brother does not repent, the

matter is to be brought before the whole congregation. Such action allows the congregation to be involved in the discipline. The congregation will "stand in fear" seeing the seriousness of sinning. This whole matter is to be conducted without partiality; regardless of the standing of the leader. The number of witnesses follows the biblical precept of the need for two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Numbers 35:30; Matthew 18:16; John 5:31-38, 8:17; II Corinthians 13:1; Hebrews 10:28).

Correcting elders also involves those who teach a different doctrine (Romans 16:17; I Timothy 1:3; 6:3-5; II John 9, 10). Today most many members are not interested in doctrine, and when the leaders are not interested, the church is impoverished. But this is an unbiblical viewpoint; doctrine is important.

Elders are to be corrected if they misuse their authority and put themselves ahead of other brethren within the church. John gave a glimpse of a sad condition within a church where an elder did this, and how he was going to handle it. "Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, prating against me with evil words. And not content with that, he refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church" (III John 9, 10). What a tragic conduct for an elder to speak evil against John and to put brethren out of the church unjustly or refuses to receive other brethren into the fellowship. To correct this situation, John planned to visit this church. On this visit he planned to bring these matters up before the brotherhood so that proper disciplinary action could be taken against this elder.

Deacons and Deaconesses

The second type of church leadership is the deacons. We can learn of their function by examining the Scripture telling how the office of deacon was first established. Luke wrote that "the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution." The apostles responded to this need by summoning "the body of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word'" (Acts 6:1-6). The Greek verb *diakoneo* (translated "to serve") is used in this passage. Later those who served were designated by the Greek noun *diakonos*, translated "deacon." The deacons were to be assistants to those who preached the Word. They were to see to the distribution of material goods to those in need.

Paul spelled out the qualities to be looked for in those who were to become deacons: "Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain; they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husband of one wife, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 3:8-13).

This passage does not mention teaching abilities as mentioned in the preceding paragraph concerning elders (I Timothy 3:2). But when faced with a challenge, they, as all Christians, could make a strong defense of the faith. Luke wrote in Acts about Stephen, one of the seven, who when confronted said, "Brethren and fathers, hear me" and went on to preach a powerful sermon (Acts 7:1-53). When persecution scattered the Jerusalem church, those "who were scattered went about preaching the word." Philip, one of the seven, went to Samaria and "proclaimed to them Christ" (Acts 8:4-8). "They believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (v. 12), and "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good

news of Jesus" (v. 35). He baptized both Simon and the Ethiopian eunuch (vs. 13, 38).

This ministry of material assistance was not limited to brethren, but sisters could also serve as deaconesses. When Paul wrote to Timothy about the qualifications of deacons, he mentioned "the women" qualifications. This shows they too served in these ministries to the needy (I Timothy 3:11). Paul also wrote about "sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church," stating that "she has been a helper of many and of myself as well" (Romans 16:1, 2).

The Greek term *diakonos* translated *deaconess* in the above passage is translated servant in the King James Version. Thayer wrote that this Greek term can be translated *servant.*, *deacon*, or *attendant*. In this passage, he writes, the term means "a deaconess . . . a woman to whom the care of the poor or sick women was entrusted." [18] As J. C. Wenger pointed out, "She is called by the very same Greek term which was given the deacons in Philippians 1:1 and I Timothy 3:8-13. The Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon defines the Greek word generally as 'servant' or 'helper,' then specifically as 'deacon' (a church official), and finally as 'deaconess,' citing Romans 16:1." [19] This *deaconess* translation is used in many newer translations, such as The Amplified New Testament, Moffatt, Phillips, and Williams translations. The American Standard Version and the New American Standard Version indicate in the footnotes the Greek term means *deaconess*. *Deaconess* is also supported by such commentaries as Clark, Lenski, Newell, etc.

Since a *deaconess* is a helper of those in need, she would not have a place of leadership in any church service. Some Christians, it seems, fear establishing *deaconesses* because they believe they will take an active part in worship services. But this will not be the case because she, as all women, is not to speak in church services.

Summary on Church Leadership

In summary, we should always remember that the church must be built on the New Testament plan and not on man-made ideas of how it should be. The early church always had a plural ministry (the New Testament always makes reference to elders, never to the singular elder). Nowhere does the New Testament refer to a one man, fully supported, professional minister in charge of a congregation.

Today many men think they should be allowed to head a local church by themselves. But we must remember "the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church . . . teachers. . . . Are all teachers?" (I Corinthians 12:14-27). God does not give gifts only to one brother within a local church so that he alone is qualified to serve the church. Gifts are given to all. The church should allow all these brethren to exercise their gifts.

Temporary New Testament Offices

Apostles

In the early church, during the New Testament formative years, there were temporary offices. One of these was the apostolic office. The apostles were the first appointed leaders (I Corinthians 12:28). At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus chose twelve apostles and taught them so they could represent Him after His return to the Father. Jesus "called his disciples, and chose from the twelve, whom he

named apostles" (Luke 6:13). "And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14, 15). Their selection was confirmed by miraculous powers so there was no doubt that they represented Jesus in establishing the New Order (Acts 3:1-16; 4:5-22; 5:12-16; 9:32-35; 9:36-43; 12:1-17; 14:1-7; 14:8-18; 15:12; 16:16-18; 19:11, 12; 20:9-12; 28:7-10; Romans 15:18, 19; II Corinthians 12:12, et al.). They were sent forth as messengers and ambassadors of Jesus and some received special gifts of inspiration to write the New Testament Scriptures.

The original apostles were to be given the highest respect and authority in the early church. Jesus stated, speaking of the twelve He sent out, "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (Matthew 10:5, 40). Their authority came from Jesus' promise to send them the Holy Spirit to "bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:26, 27). Just after this, He stated that "when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Jesus told Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). These disciples quickly grasped this as a teaching concept since "keys" were the symbol of the scribes, the teachers of the law.[20] These keys were given to Peter, but as Acts 15 shows, the keys were also given to the apostles in general. All the apostles were called together to a conference in Jerusalem to consider the question how the Gentiles related to the Mosaic Law. Peter did not decide this question as if he alone had the keys to the kingdom.

Paul made an allusion to this teaching of Christ when he wrote that "the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19, 20). The church was built by all the apostles, thus they as a group possessed the keys. These keys enabled Christ to build His church after His resurrection.

The apostles did not arbitrarily decide what to bind and loosen on their own. Jesus told them, "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:25, 26). Later Jesus told them the Holy Spirit "will bear witness to me" and the apostles will be "witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:26, 27).

Jesus explained to the apostles, "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but what ever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:12, 13). The sending of the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles and their companions to write the Gospels and other New Testament books. This whole process served to bind and loosen the will of God for the church age. This means "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16, 17).

The apostles received a commission from Jesus that included "teaching them [new believers] to observe all that I have commanded" (Matthew 28:20). The promise of the Holy Spirit was repeated later: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The apostles were the first overseers in the church. Luke wrote concerning Judas who fell away, "his office let another take," indicating the twelve were "overseers" in the church (Acts 1:20). They were also strong teachers, being instrumental in bringing the church into existence and being responsible to teach her the way Jesus wanted to build His church. We see that they used their oversight commissioned at the Jerusalem conference when Luke stated, "Then it seemed good to the apostles" (Acts 15:22).

Luke wrote that in the early church the disciples "devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching" (Acts 2:42). The apostles were so outspoken in their teaching that the Jewish leaders told them, "We strictly charge you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching" (5:28). They did not obey the council's command because they first had to obey God; therefore "they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (v. 42). When they needed more time to teach, they believed it was "not right that [they] should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" and appointed others to handle the physical assistance they were carrying out. They then devoted themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (6:2-4). This was very effective because "the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly" (v. 7).

The apostles' goal, as Paul wrote, was to "destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God" (II Corinthians 10:5). The people needed to understand God's way to redemption, and for them to understand, they needed to be convinced.

The apostles were the leaders Jesus commissioned to "build my church" and bring the Word into written form. In Acts 1 we learn that the apostles had to be eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry and of His resurrection (Acts 1:21, 22; cf. I Corinthians 9:1). This means that their office existed only at the beginning of the church. No one has the right to use this title today.

Prophets

Another temporary group that served with the apostles were the prophets. Paul tied the two groups together, "You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19, 20), and "it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:5). Thus these prophets held an important position in the early church, and they stood second to the apostles. They were special messengers of God and held a similar position to their Old Testament counterparts. The early church was keenly aware that their time was a special period of revelation and that the prophets were sent directly by God along with the apostles to bring it about. Paul wrote, "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets . . ." (I Corinthians 12:28) and "his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets . . ." (Ephesians 4:11).

In the Book of Acts, Luke wrote about prophets. He wrote of an instance where "prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world; and this took place in the days of Claudius" (Acts 11:27, 28). These prophets could actually predict coming events, which in this case undoubtedly helped the brethren prepare for the famine, and thus strengthened the church in her formative years. Luke briefly mentioned about other prophets. He wrote, "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers" (Acts 13:1), "And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them" (Acts 15:32). He wrote in more detail, "While we were staying for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us he took Paul's girdle and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When Luke and the others heard this, they believed this prophet and begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul did not change his plans but went. He stated he was "ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:10-13).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about their need to "earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. . . . he who prophesies speaks to men for the upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. . . . he who prophesies edifies the church. . . . Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another . . . the spirits of the prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace . . . If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord" (I Corinthians 14:2-4, 29, 32, 33, 37).

The presence of both apostles and prophets in the early church made the disciples aware that a new revelation was coming from God and that inspired Scripture superseding the Old Testament was coming into existence in their day. This apostolic and prophetic period ended, and now we have the "foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:20).

Evangelists

The evangelists were special assistants to the apostles. Thayer wrote, "This name is given in the New Testament to those heralds of salvation through Christ who are not apostles." [21]

They were, from the meaning of the Greek word, messengers of good tidings. This office was mentioned after the two offices we just discussed, "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists . . ." (Ephesians 4:11).

We find the term *evangelist* is mentioned only twice in the New Testament: "Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven" (Acts 21:8) and Timothy was to "do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry" (II Timothy 4:5).

The Book of Acts gives us some details about Philip's activities. He went to Samaria and "proclaimed to them Christ" (Acts 8:5-14). He then went south to the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza and explained the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch (vs. 25-39). After this he went along the Mediterranean coast and preached in all the towns up to Caesarea (v. 40).

We know from Paul's writings that Timothy was one of his assistants. He assisted Paul at Corinth (II Corinthians 1:19). He was sent by Paul to the Corinthian church (I Corinthians 16:10), to the Philippian church (Philippians 2:19), and to the Thessalonian church (I Thessalonians 3:2). He helped with Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 1:1). Paul wrote that he was "God's servant in the gospel of Christ, to establish you in your faith and to exhort you" (I Thessalonians 3:2).

Another of Paul's assistants was Titus. Presumably he too was an evangelist, but there is no record in the New Testament that this title was applied to him.

These evangelists were not like our present day "revivalist" who take the name and work upon themselves. When the apostolic office ceased, there was no need for assistants. The early church evangelists had power to ordain elders in new churches, but there is no record that they ordained evangelists, thus it was a temporary office. It was only much later in the church history that men took this title upon themselves again.

Other Special Gifts in The Early Church

In Paul's lists of leaders in the church, he mentioned other groups: "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues" (I Corinthians 12:28). These all appear to be special leaders given to aid the early church in her formative years.

The Greek term *kubernhsei* (12:28) translated administrators needs to be clarified since it may give an image of a person sitting behind a big desk and "running" the church. The term comes *kubernhth* which means "captain, navigator" (GNT) to steer a boat. God has given some elders the responsibility to "steer" or lead the church. Their job is not a desk job but one where they work at "steering" the church.

Church Government

No church government or bureaucracy was known in the early church. The basic organization was the local church, although there was a church conference (Acts 15). We should seek to follow this biblical pattern in our organization today.

We should be aware that there is a desire for some to rise above the early church's example and set up structured organizations. Jesus spoke to this issue, "A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves'" (Luke 22:24-27; cf. Matthew 20:25-28). No one within the church should seek to elevate himself; there are no kings or benefactors within the church. Church leaders are to be servants.

The goal of the church's ministering brethren should be as Paul summed it up when he wrote to the Ephesian church:

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. Ephesians 4:11-16

. This describes a worthy goal for ministering brethren, and they need not try to go beyond it.

Institutionalism

Throughout Israel's history the Jewish people tended to look to their neighbors and copy them. Today most professing Christian churches seem to have done likewise. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, number of churches rushed to copy the big business/corporation approach to carry out the functions of the church. The result has been "institutionalism," that is, an "emphasis on organization (as in religion) at the expense of other factors" (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*). The men who pushed this institutional approach had a zeal but it was unenlightened, and thus this approach has not been successful and has weakened the church.

When Jesus said He would build "my church," He did not build an imperfect church that would need man-made institutions added to it hundreds of years later to make it work. He through His disciples built a church that carried out her work through the local church. Thus in the Book of Acts, and throughout the New Testament, we find no mention of the institutions that have become so important to the twentieth-century church.

Little can be said to support the present day so-called "work of the church," where local churches delegate their functions and work to institutions, except to say that it is not the New Testament way. Perhaps we need to reemphasize that "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16). It is the biblical way that is authentic and that is profitable. Let us remember what was stressed at the beginning of this book, that "unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1). We are to be careful builders "according to the commission of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one

builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw - each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (I Corinthians 3:10-15).

The institutional approach should be rejected for the following reasons:

1. The church must practice good stewardship and do the work that was assigned her. As for the use of funds, the top priority for their use is helping the needy within the church. If the church would have done this work, the vast social institutions that have been built throughout church history would not have come into being. Only by taking away from the needy have funds been available to build the great institutions.

2. When one looks at the results of institutionalism, the lack of fruit gives clear evidence that this is not the approach that God uses in building the church. Look at the history of colleges and universities. Hundreds of these have been started to teach Christian truths to the youth of the church. But look at what has happened in general to them - they fall and lead the youth away from the faithful New Testament ways. The end result is often apostasy. When we see this *fruit*, why would any faithful church want to take the risk of starting a new school? In the past, many churches have taken that risk and thought they had safeguards to protect the new institutions from falling away, only to learn later that this was not the case. And the sad thing is, this is learned only after it is too late to correct the problems. Man has always wanted to make his own religion, and many Christians have tried to by making institutions, but these "man-made" works always fail.

In light of the failures, when "brethren" come to individuals and to the local churches saying they need funds to keep the Lord's work going, that is, to keep the institutions going, one must examine their claims. Just because they claim to be doing the Lord's work, one must not accept their assertion as being true. One must always return to the Scriptures and look for scriptural basis for these claims.

3. In many areas of the world Christianity has come under persecution because of the past sins of institutionalism. The Communists have said that the *church* has been the opium of the people, and in many cases they have been right because those claiming to be the *church* were not a true New Testament church. Following God's ways prevents many problems.

4. The institutional approach causes Christians to believe that the work of the church is "out there," and they fail to exercise the gifts they have. They feel they are doing the work of the church by supporting the institutions when in reality they are misusing the gifts given to build the church.

5. There is no need for institutions because the local church can more easily and effectively^{3/4}and without great administrative expense -- carry on the work of the church. The local church can also keep the work under closer examination and can prevent the work from departing from the truth. God's ways are always the most effective and the safest ways.

In light of the lack of a Scriptural basis and the above reasons, the institutional approach must be rejected. The above is not to say that the functions these institutions seek to carry out are not valid. The issue is a question of how the work is to be carried out. It must be carried out by the local church, not man-made institutions, be it colleges, mission boards, mutual aid organizations, publishing houses, Sunday schools, or whatever. All these works belong to the church, and she must be the center of activity.

ENDNOTES

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
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