

# THE ELDERSHIP

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## A FOREWORD

Before you read this little volume, please remember four things:

1. *The dearth of printed matter on the subject of the eldership.* When we think of the important work of the eldership – his vital and God-given connection with the church – it is strange that more has not been written for his benefit. For his special work as a preacher thousands of pages have been published, but for the general work the dearth is surprising.
2. *The need of the field.* Within this Restoration movement alone there are ten thousand churches, averaging perhaps four elders to the church, making forty thousand elders. These men are called to perform the most important duties known to the earth, and yet when they turn to the publishers for help, they find that they have been forgotten or neglected by the bookmakers.
3. *The aim of the author.* In the preparation of this volume we have not aimed so much at literary excellence as at practical value and scriptural loyalty. We have striven in a plain way to apply the teachings of the Book to the every-day wants of the church.
4. *The spirit of the work.* Some of the questions dealt with are controversial. These we have discussed candidly, but kindly, striving at all times to avoid the spirit of controversy.

Praying the blessings of Heaven upon it, this little book is sent forth on its mission among men by THE AUTHOR.

## CHAPTER I

### NAMES APPLIED TO THE ELDERSHIP

The ministry of the New Testament church is fivefold: apostles, prophets, evangelists, elders and deacons. This ministry, as regards the character and duration of the work, is twofold: apostles and prophets were inspired teachers – infallible fountains of light and authority – and therefore extraordinary; but evangelists, elders and deacons were for perpetual service, and so may be called ordinary. The first, aided by special gifts, completed the organization of the church, and started her on her world-wide voyage of conquest, and then retired; but the second, as permanent features of the Lord's kingdom, are to continue until the work of the church is finished. A great ship needs help in clearing the harbor and so tug-boats aid her until she reaches the broad, deep sea, then leave her in her own strength to complete the journey. Even so, when the "old ship of Zion" was clearing the port of Jerusalem, she needed special miraculous aid: the tug-boats of the first century. But when once well out on the sea of life, with the "narrows" of Jewish prejudice and the "shallows" of racial pride behind her, these miracles were no longer necessary, and hence were withdrawn. Since then, perfectly equipped, she has crossed all seas and entered almost every port beneath the skies, bearing the glad message of salvation to a lost world. She needs no miracles now, for she has on board the perfected truth of God: that which existed in God's mind before the first miracle was wrought, and that which will continue to exist as long as God lives, with the record of the miracles. Scaffolding, during the construction of a building, is a necessity; but when it is completed it is not only unnecessary, but is a hindrance, and hence is torn away. Miracles today would be a positive hindrance to the progress of the Gospel.

Our present purpose is to study the work of the eldership, the fourth office of the New Testament ministry.

## **NAMES APPLIED TO THE ELDERSHIP**

The eldership is so wide in scope and so varied in character that no single term can fully describe it, hence several are used. Let us notice four of them:

### ***Elders***

The first occurrence of this word in the Bible is in Gen. 10:21, where Shem is called the brother of Japheth the elder. The second is Gen. 25:23, where, speaking of Jacob and Esau, it is said that the elder shall serve the younger. There are many other passages where the word indicates that one person is older than another, but is silent as to the ages of the persons spoken of. Sometimes the reference is to old men, as in the case of the elders of Israel, and sometimes to unborn babes, as in the case of Jacob and Esau. The original use of the word, then, refers to chronological order, without reference to the time involved.

The first official use of the word is found in Gen. 50:7, where it is said that “all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt,” went with Joseph to the burial of his father. As an official term, then, it is Egyptian in origin.

In Num. 11:16, 17 we learn that the Lord, in answer to a complaint from Moses that the burden of governing Israel was more than he could bear, said, “Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel... and officers over them, that they may stand with thee; and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them, and they shall bear the burden with thee.” Here Jehovah sets apart seventy men, called elders, to co-operate in the government of Israel. But we do not know the ages of the men.

Tracing our word onward through the Old Testament and into the New, we find it used as an official title of great influence and authority. By their truth and traditions they swayed the minds of the

multitudes, and molded the policies of the people. W. L. Hayden says, "As an official term the word expresses government by men of age, prominence, experience and wisdom." But this does not mean that every old man should be an elder in an official sense, for age is not always associated with wisdom. And often men young in years are old in wisdom. This may be the reason why the age of an elder is not given. "That man is old enough for the office," says President Milligan, "who has the wisdom profitable to direct all things."

### ***Bishops***

Acts 20:28: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of God which he purchased with his own blood." Here Paul calls bishops those whom Luke in verse 17 calls elders, showing that the two titles were applied to the same officer. It is also true that the term overseer might with propriety be used here. But in spite of the fact that overseers, bishops and presbyters, in New Testament parlance, mean the same thing, it must be admitted that early in the history of the church the word bishop began to assume a meaning different from, and superior to, the others. This, considering the ambition of men, is not strange. When we band together for any purpose, it is necessary to organize. There must be a presiding officer. In legislative assemblies there must be the speaker of the house, and in the judiciary there must be the supreme judge. And after the death of the apostles, when corruption began to make serious progress, the president of the board of elders came to be called bishop. Nor was it long until these bishops of different congregations began to convene in advisory councils and issue decrees regarding the faith and conduct of their churches. This seeming to work well, other decrees of wider scope followed. And soon, spurred on by the desire for pre-eminence, decrees, mandatory in character, came forth, and the full-fledged metropolitan bishop, in the person of the pope of Rome, the Vicar of Christ, was born. Thus early was the divine method of church government centralized, debased and well-nigh destroyed.

### ***Pastors***

Eph. 4:11: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and

some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” The comparison here is to the beautiful life of the Oriental shepherd. Both the Hebrew and Greek languages are fond of the figure, and it has many applications in Bible history. No life was more familiar to the Jew than that of the shepherd. It was his business to lead the flock into green pastures, and beside still waters, and to protect them from the wolves, lions and bears, always seeking their destruction. And if one was sick, or lame, or wounded, he was to give it special care, often carrying the young lamb in his bosom. And should one stray away and be lost, he was to go out into the mountains and seek it until it was found; and then bring it, with rejoicing, into the fold.

The eldership is to shepherd the flock by leading, feeding, guiding and guarding; and this not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but for love; and not as lords over God’s heritage, but as examples to the flock. “And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of rejoicing that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 4:1-4).

### ***Teachers***

Tit. 1:9: “Holding fast the faithful word as he [the bishop] hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” (See 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Tim. 5:17.) Teaching is one of the highest, most honorable, and most important phases of the work of the eldership. The Savior is called by pre-eminence the Chief Shepherd, and *the* teacher, and the eldership is composed of under-shepherds and under-teachers. It is significant and suggestive that Christ, though the Prince and model of preachers for all time, is much more often spoken of as a Teacher than as a Preacher. The eldership of today should note this vital suggestion, and become students of the Book.

It is now clear to all why these different titles are given to the same officer in the church. He is called an elder because of his age, experience and wisdom; he is called bishop or overseer, because he is to watch over and direct everything that pertains to the spiritual culture of the congregation; he is called pastor or shepherd, because he is to watch for deathless souls as one who is to give account to

God; and he is called teacher, because the church, like the students in a school, is looking to him for instruction.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS**

Those occupying such responsible positions in the kingdom of God must be men of rare qualifications. By reference to 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9, and 1 Pet. 5:1-4, we learn what these qualifications are. There are twenty of them – seven negative, and thirteen positive.

#### **NEGATIVE QUALIFICATIONS**

##### ***Not Given To Wine***

Of course not. A drinking man in such a place would shock the world and disgrace the church. Like Caesar's wife, he should be above suspicion.

##### ***Not A Striker***

He must not be pugnacious, either in a material or spiritual sense, but always and everywhere a peacemaker.

##### ***Not Greedy Of Filthy Lucre, Or Covetous***

He must be "diligent in business, and fervent in spirit," but there must be no dirty dollars in his coffers. He must not be overly eager to possess, or carried away with avarice. Not a lover of money, but a lover of men; not absorbed in laying up treasures on earth, but striving to become rich toward God. Idolatry was the besetting sin of the Old Testament, and covetousness in the New is called idolatry (Col. 3:5).

##### ***Not A Brawler***

Not noisy, or a wrangler, but quiet and gentle. Though he may



often have to defend the faith, his manner must not be that of the ward politician, but that of a dignified, courteous Christian gentleman.

### ***Not A Novice***

Not a new convert, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into condemnation of Satan. Timber must be seasoned before it is fit for a place in a great ship or building, and a soldier must learn in the ranks to obey, before he is called to command.

### ***Not Self-Willed***

Not obstinately unmindful of the will and wishes of others; but, while contending for the right, always considerably mindful of the man in the wrong. The self-willed man is sure to wreck the church over which he rules.

### ***Not Soon Angry***

Not given to revengeful passions against one guilty of supposed or real wrong, but careful in words and actions in the hour of provocation. Anger blinds the eyes and dethrones the reason, and converts us into merciless tyrants. Like always begets like. The parent who rules his home in anger sows the seeds for a similar life in his children. The same is true of the church, for it is the family of God.

## **POSITIVE QUALIFICATIONS**

### ***Must Be The Husband Of One Wife***

These words abstractly considered would teach that either celibacy or polygamy disqualifies one for the office of elder. But this is not true. Celibacy in itself is not an evil. Christ was never married. And it would seem that Paul and Barnabas, two of the most eminent men of the primitive church, had no wives (1 Cor. 9:5). But polygamy is one of the worst evils, and is the fruitful source of many other evils. It nullifies the purpose of God in creation, when the first home was established in Eden with one husband and one wife. It is a foe to conjugal affection. It produces envy and jealousy, and destroys harmony and love. "It is, therefore, probable," says

Milligan, “that monogamy is here opposed only to polygamy, and that to free the church, as far as possible, from this then prevalent evil, was the benevolent object of the apostle.” Isaac Errett says, “We take it that the import of the phrase is, that he must be, or must have been, a married man, with a family of his own, superior to others not in having one wife, but in the skill and faithfulness with which he rules in his family. All the directions concerning marriage in the New Testament are based on the idea of the union of one man and one woman. No man is taught how to behave toward more than one wife.”

### ***Vigilant***

Always on the alert to discover and avoid danger, and to provide safety for the endangered. The shepherd who was not wakeful and watchful could not care for his flock. A sleepy saint is no match for a wide-awake sinner; and a sluggish elder cannot cope with the enemies of the church of God.

### ***Sober***

Free from extremes; rational; sane; level-headed: a man possessed of a large amount of common sense. This fine element of character will be in constant demand in the eldership; and he who has it not, though possessed of the highest culture of the schools, and though a man of piety and purity, is not fitted for this important place.

### ***Of good behavior***

Not uncouth or boorish, but chaste, courteous and polite. No place in all the world is more befitting the true gentleman than the church of God. This is true of every member, but doubly so of her office-bearers.

### ***Given to hospitality***

His door should be wide open, and his hospitality so generous and genuine that his brethren would delight to come into his home. He should be a lover of strangers, especially of young men away from the home of childhood. Such recognition at this time, in many cases, is the one supreme need. Extended, and a life is saved;

withheld, and a life is lost. The elder's home is the place above all others where hospitality should never be remembered as one of the lost arts.

### ***Patient***

Able to endure provocation without murmuring or fretfulness, and willing to wait for the slow development of Christian character in his charge. No mother without this rich virtue can bring up her children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. How great, then, must be its need in a family so much larger in number, and so varied in disposition.

### ***A Lover Of Good Men***

His own life, modeled after the life of Jesus, finds an affinity in the life of every other good man. He associates with bad men, as his Master did, only that he may help them into a better life. The company he keeps tells of the life he lives. He is never compromised by his companions.

### ***Just***

An elder must not be doubtful in his dealings with his fellow-men. He must always do, or aim to do, the right thing. Such a man is an irresistible power for good. His words may not be many or eloquent, but his deeds, like the fragrance of flowers, sweet, pleasing, attractive and helpful, are known and appreciated by all men – the bad as well as the good.

### ***Holy***

Consecrated and set apart to sacred purposes, as the *holy* priesthood and the *holy* Sabbath. He should be known as God's man, just as the first day of the week is known as the Lord's Day. His motto, like the motto of Paul, should always be, "This one thing I do." His business should be to serve God, though he might have to make tents for a living.

### ***Blameless***

Undeserving of censure, faultless, unsullied, irreproachable. One who gives the adversary no hold upon him; one against whom

no charge of purposed evil can be sustained. What a trinity of virtues: “Just,” “Holy,” “Blameless!” Who is able for this high calling? Not one, except his life be hid with Christ in God.

### ***Temperate***

Not excessive, lavish or inordinate, but moderate in desires, language, passions, appetite and conduct; calm, self-contained and self-restrained. This virtue shades into that of soberness, and each is strengthened by the other.

### ***Apt To Teach***

Skillful in imparting instruction in Bible knowledge; able to educate the church in both the doctrinal and the practical things of the Christian religion. The teacher in the schoolroom, ignorant of the things to be taught, or knowing them, but unable to impart his knowledge to others, would not be able to hold his position. Is not the church a school, and the eldership its teachers?

### ***Of Good Report Among Them Without.***

Those not Christians – Jews, infidels, scoffers, moralists – must regard him as a good man. They may not like his religion, but they must like him; they may not appreciate his theories, but they must like his practice. His deportment must be such that they shall not regard it as inconsistent with his profession; and should he personally try to lead one of them into the Christian life, they must be unable to say, “Physician, heal thyself.”

Many good men, seeing this high standard, are discouraged, and refuse to serve in the eldership. Others argue that as no one man can be found possessing all these qualifications, a number should be selected combining them all, somewhat on the plan of selecting a jury. One man is not regarded as equal to the task of rendering a just verdict, and so he is reinforced by eleven others, hoping that in the wisdom of twelve men justice will be meted out to all. They claim that this is a description of the office, and not the officer.

But this reasoning is erroneous. The standard, coming from a Divine source, could not be less than perfect. The Savior in the

Sermon on the Mount, proclaimed just such a standard for all Christians. “Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). When a boy is learning to write, a perfect copy at the top of the page is a wonderful inspiration to him, and no one would have it less than perfect. He understands that for a time he will not be able to reproduce it perfectly. But by persistent effort, aided by his teacher, he hopes to do it in the end. And so here, as everywhere, our Father holds before us the standard of perfection, while he ever stands near to aid us in reaching it. And the time will come, if we continue our efforts, when we will succeed. Therefore, the standard must not be lowered, but our lives must be lifted higher.

## CHAPTER III

### DUTIES OF ELDERS

In addition to the Scriptures referred to in Chapter II, we must add Acts 20:28 for full information as to the duties of the eldership. There are two classes of these duties: the first class relates to the elder himself, and the second to his flock.

#### DUTIES RELATING TO THE ELDERSHIP

##### *Take Heed To Yourselves*

Luke, referring to his biography of Jesus, says, “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). We see here that in the life of the Lord the *doing* came before the *teaching*: and so it must be with all who would follow in his footsteps. If an elder teaches his people to be truthful, he must not be false; if he teaches them to forgive, there must be no malice in his heart. He must do these things first, and then his teaching will tell.

Before his work begins, let there be a thorough introspection. Let the searchlight of heaven be turned on in full force, that no sin be left lurking in his bosom. Let the prayer of David be his prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). His faith must be unfeigned; his purpose must be unselfish; and his piety must be pure. He must be loyal to his Lord. Temptations and dangers will assail him as they did his Master, and if there is a flaw in his armor they will find it. He must have the courage of his convictions, and if need be, die, rather than prove false to the faith. He must be every whit a man.

## ***He Must Rule His Own House Well***

Elders were chosen from the older men, and they generally had families. And their fitness or unfitness for the office would be manifest in the way they governed in the home. The man who cannot train his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is unfit to train God's children in the way of life. But one who can do this, other things being equal, is the very man for the place. Confucius says, "He who knows not how to govern his own family cannot govern a people." And a greater than Confucius asks, "If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care for the church of God?"

The home was God's first institution, and like its author, it is immortal. It began with Adam and Eve in Eden; it continued through the Patriarchal age, and made possible the Jewish nation; and it continues to this day, one of the most important of the conserving powers of this remarkable people. Many other things peculiar to them in their early history have passed away, but not this. It is emphasized and exalted in the Christian age. Christ came into the world through the door of a home, and His last act on the cross was providing one for his mother after He was gone. And when this world shall cease to be, and we enter upon the eternal age, it will still be a home, for we will then be in our "Father's house."

The home is not only first and last in the economy of Jehovah, but it is fundamental. It came before both church and state, and made their existence possible. And if they were destroyed, and the home preserved, they would be reproduced; but if the home were destroyed, all would be quickly swallowed up in hopeless ruin. What dignity and glory, therefore, to be the head of a home, and how fitting that one successful there should be called to rule over the church of God.

## ***Holding Fast The Faithful Word***

If the Truth is the "lamp unto our feet, and the light unto our path" (Psalm 119:105), how important that it be preserved in all its original purity and power? What sailor would dare an ocean voyage without his chart and compass? And what would be the fate of him

who would mutilate or destroy that which was to guide him amid the winds and waves of the sea?

Paul said to the Ephesian elders: “I know 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 20:29, 30). And John says, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 9-11). And we are exhorted to “earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). These bad men did come, and they are still coming, and they will continue to come till the end of time. The genuine man and the true doctrine, like a genuine coin, will always be counterfeited. The eldership, therefore, must watch for these outside foes and these inside enemies – wolves in sheep’s clothing – and protect the flock over which the Lord has made them overseers. They stand related to this flock as a father to the home, and they must protect it with the same fidelity and courage with which they would protect their own child. In this defense they must not be like ruffians or reptiles, but like valorous Christian soldiers, loyal to their Leader, and true to the sacred trust committed to their charge. They must realize that without this Word the spiritual world would be like the material universe with the sun blotted out; all would be darkness and death. The church would be like a ship in mid-ocean with chart and compass thrown overboard.

And there never was a time when this vigilant oversight was more needed than now. Men denying the very fundamentals of the faith are seen in the pulpit, the schoolroom and in the editorial chair. There is scarcely one such doctrine which has not been assailed recently by these men. And it is doubtful if Paine and Ingersoll ever uttered ranker infidelity than is heard from some of them.

## **DUTIES RELATING TO THE FLOCK**

### ***Be Examples To The Flock***

An ounce of example is worth a pound of precept. People are so



busy watching what we do that they have little opportunity to hear what we say. The world is largely governed by examples. Children imitate their parents. Inferiors imitate superiors. Young men imitate older ones. And old ones are influenced by the remembered example of some strong friend long since dead. The daring deed of some chivalrous leader prompts multitudes to rush into the jaws of death.

Who can fully estimate the value of a godly mother's life upon her children? Or that of a great teacher upon his students? Or that of a pious preacher upon his people? Or that of a noble hero upon his followers? Christ's example in the wilderness teaches us how to meet the Tempter; His example at the Jordan teaches us the lesson of obedience; His patience with the erring makes us forbearing; His tears at the grave of Lazarus fill our hearts with sympathy; His busy life for others makes us unselfish; His prayers in the hour of sorrow send us to God when the burden is heavy; and His triumphant death on Calvary shows us how to die. How poor the world would be without the record of His example as he went about "doing good."

An elder must be an example to his flock: an example in his chaste conversation; an example in his righteous conduct; an example in forgiving love; an example in his devotion to the Lord; an example in prayer; an example in giving. In a word, he must be able to say with Paul, "Be ye followers of me, even as I am also of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). "O! it is glorious in honor," says O. A. Burgess, "but fearful in responsibility, to be a Christian bishop." May our hearts yearn for this honor and responsibility.

### ***Take Heed To The Flock***

The look before was inward, now it is outward; then he was to examine self, now he is to examine others. And his feelings at this time must be akin to that of a mother as she looks for the first time into the face of her first-born. What possibilities and responsibilities she sees there. She beholds a spirit capable of becoming an angel of light, or a demon of darkness; of mounting into the highest heaven, or of sinking into the deepest hell. What an appeal in this vision for her to be to this little one all that a mother can be. And so, when an

elder, called of God, looks into the faces of his flock, his spirit must be stirred within him. Here is, not one of God's children, but many of them, made in the image of the Father, and destined to live with him forever, or be cast into endless outer darkness; and their destiny to a large degree is placed in his hands. "If we work upon marble," says Webster, "it will perish; if we work upon brass, time will efface it; if we rear temples, they will crumble into dust; but if we work upon immortal minds, if we imbue them with principles, with the just fear of God and love of our fellow-men, we engrave on those tablets something that will brighten to all eternity."

### ***Feed The Flock***

Nothing is of more importance to the body than the food we eat, and the parent who is unfaithful here is guilty of the blood of his own offspring. The shepherd who would permit his flock to feed on poisonous food would be dismissed in disgrace. The eldership must see that the church is properly fed. This food is twofold: doctrinal and practical. There can be no strong life without both of these. Those who want the practical without the doctrinal are like men who expect flowers without roots and stems, and houses without foundations and frames. And those who would have the doctrinal alone would have pressed flowers without life, beauty, fruit or fragrance. As in holy wedlock, the twain are one flesh, and neither is perfect without the other.

The doctrinal ought to include a brief but comprehensive view of the Bible, with a clear conception of the development of the scheme of redemption through the Patriarchal, Jewish and Christian dispensations. The difference between Moses and Christ, and the Law and the Gospel, should be made so plain that no one could misunderstand it. The great divisions of the Old and New Testaments – especially the New – should be made to stand out with the distinctness of the divisions in a text-book on mathematics. The law of pardon as it relates to both the sinner and the transgressing Christian should be made simple as the alphabet. The place and purpose of the two ordinances, Baptism and the Supper, should be clearly defined. And following this, there should be a short sketch of the apostolic church as seen in the Acts and Epistles with an account

of her corruption, and the “Dark Ages” following. And then there should be a brief account of the Reformation of the Sixteenth century, with other kindred movements of the time, and closing with a careful study of the Restoration Movement of the Nineteenth century. Also a few of the strongest proofs of the Inspiration of the Bible, and of the Divinity of the Christ, should be given. All of this could be easily grasped by every one – even the busiest and the uneducated – and the average elder ought to be able to give it. Converts thus trained would be “no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14), but would be steady and strong in the Lord. They would be ready always to give an answer for the reason of the hope within them (1 Pet. 3:15). They would not be like the bright girl who, when asked what she believed, said, “I believe what my church believes.” And when asked what her church believed, she answered, “My church believes what I believe.” And finally, when asked what they both believed, she said, “We both believe the same thing.” Such a girl, had her teachers done their duty, would never have been caught in this dilemma.

The practical opens up a field which never can be finished, for it includes the things that enter into the full development of the Christian life. The foundation and frame of the house have been completed, and now it is theirs to finish a temple fit for the indwelling of God himself (1 Cor. 3:16). They are now to strive to attain “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). And here the eldership should do its best work. These young Christians should be carefully drilled in things spiritual as they are by their day teachers in things intellectual. They should be taught how to read the Bible, the importance of church attendance, the meaning of the Lord’s Supper, prayer, praise, the fellowship, missions, Sunday-school and Endeavor work, the value of good books and good associates, etc. Thus would they learn how to live and labor for Christ. Thousands of precious young lives are lost because they are not put to work for the Master immediately after entering His vineyard. Do or die is the law in the spiritual realm as it is everywhere else. Satan is always with us, and idle brains and idle hands are used by him in the church as well as in the world.

## ***Rule Well***

We have seen so much of arbitrary power, and so much of the “one man power,” and so much of the tyranny of creeds and councils in the history of the church, that we are liable to swing to the other extreme, and discard all power. But let us not forget that the kingdom of God is neither Republicanism nor Democracy, but a monarchy, with Christ as King. The organization is perfect, and the rulership is in the hands of Christ’s representatives, the eldership, and He will not hold them guiltless if they shrink from their responsibilities.

The Scriptures are clear on the question of this rulership. “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor” (1 Tim. 5:17). “Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God” (Heb. 13:7). “Obey them who have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as those who must give an account” (Heb. 13:17). The elder, then, must be a ruler. Not a tyrant, cruel and heartless, lording it over God’s heritage, but a father, with a wise head and a loving heart, ruling in his own home. And in order to do this he must possess in a high degree the three virtues: wisdom, tenderness and firmness. And when these are properly blended the work will generally be easier than we are apt to think. Most of the erring ones, if approached wisely and tenderly, will respond to the appeal. But occasionally this will not be true. The wrongdoer angrily resents the well-meant efforts of his elders, and repudiates their authority. Then they must be firm, and other methods must be used. These people, if not ruled in one way, must be ruled in another. The church, like the family, must have rulership, or it will have ruin. There are times when the shepherd gently leads his flock by still waters and in green fields; and there are also times when in the might of his strength he must tear away the disguise of the wolf and save the flock. Christ was generally as tender as a nursing mother; but when it was necessary His denunciations were terrible (Matt. 24:1-33). When the temple was being polluted by bad men, and being changed from a place of prayer to a house of merchandise, He, with a scourge, drove them into the streets (John 2:13-17).

In view of the qualifications and duties of the eldership it is not strange that many good men, when called upon by their congregations, hesitate, and often decline to accept the office. The standard is so high, and the obligations are so many, so difficult, and so sacred, that it would be stranger still were it otherwise. But let all such men remember that the honor and reward are correspondingly great. In military life, when difficult and dangerous duties are to be performed the best troops are selected. And so our Commander tenders you honors and rewards richer than the world ever knew, and you must not decline them.

## CHAPTER IV

### PLURALITY OF ELDERS

The New Testament church has a plurality of elders. Just how many should be in each congregation depends on circumstances. If the congregation is small, and the material for such officers is scarce, there should be only a few; but if it is large, and the material is abundant, there should be many; but in every fully organized church there is a plurality. A few quotations will make this clear:

1. “Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren who dwelt in Judea. Which also they did, and sent it to the *elders* by Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29).
2. “And when they had ordained them *elders* in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23).
3. “And from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the *elders* of the church” (Acts 20:17).
4. “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain *elders* in every city, as I commanded thee” (Tit. 1:5). See also Acts 15:4; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:17; Jas. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1.

This is in striking contrast with modern Christendom, and shows how far many have wandered from the original model. It is common now to see a single elder, or bishop, with many congregations under him, but not the single congregation with a plurality of bishops over it. And yet it is always true in the New Testament that *each church had a plurality of bishops, but no bishop had a plurality of churches*. The substitution of effusion for immersion is not a greater departure from Bible teaching than is the modern idea of the bishop. Mosheim, the eminent church historian, speaking of this change,

says, "Let none confound the bishops of this primitive and golden period of the church with those of whom we read in the following ages; for, though they were both distinguished by the same name, yet they differed in many respects. A bishop during the first and second centuries was a person who had the care of one Christian assembly, which, at that time, generally speaking, was small enough to be contained in a private house. In this assembly he acted, not so much with the authority of a master, as with the zeal and diligence of a faithful servant."

The growth of this apostasy was as rapid as it was deadly. The ambition of men, and the love of pre-eminence and power, have ever been among our chief dangers. For a while one bishop presided over each assembly, or church, and was called to this office by a vote of the people. He soon organized a presbytery, which varied in numbers, to whom he assigned their several tasks.

The churches at this time were independent of each other, and knew nothing of any associations or confederacies, other than the bonds of charity. Each was a little government within itself. But in process of time the churches of a state or territory were formed into a large ecclesiastical body, and they met at certain times to consider their general interests. These assemblies, composed of representatives of the churches, were called councils or synods, and the laws they enacted were called canons, or rules. These synods in a short time changed the church entirely. The privileges of the people were much reduced, but the power and authority of the bishops were greatly increased. But these men were wise enough not to assume at first all the power with which they were later invested. When they first appeared in these councils they modestly claimed that they were the delegates of their respective churches and acted only in their name. But this humble tone soon changed, and imperceptibly the limits of their authority were enlarged, and their influence became authority and their counsels became laws; and they boldly proclaimed that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to the churches *authoritative rules of faith and practice*.

The next step was the abolition of the equality which reigned among these bishops. In their great assemblies they needed a head –

someone invested with superior power and authority – and hence the appearance of the metropolitan bishop. But another, and final step, was necessary. The bounds of the church were enlarged, and new officers, called patriarchs, were appointed in different parts of the world, as heads in their provinces. By this time the people were helpless, and these rulers had become insolent, and they created a new dignity: a world ruler, whom they called the Pope of Rome, the Vicar of Christ.

The church of today should not lose this lesson. Centralization of power is as dangerous now as it was then. At that time it was followed by the “Dark Ages.” This is its natural product. Great power held long and easily naturally produces corruption and oppression. This is not true in the commercial and political world only, but it is awfully true of the religious world. And here is the danger in mammoth organizations in the church. Their rulers, after long service as rulers, being human, are liable to forget that they are servants, and arrogate unto themselves the prerogatives of masters. Examples of this tendency can be found in modern, as well as in ancient, history. One of our churches, struggling hard to build a house, decided to omit her missionary pledge for one year. The preacher was promptly informed by the authorities in the society that this must not be. He replied, telling them that the action of the congregation was not because of decreasing interest in missionary work – that they would resume their pledge at the earliest possible day – but solely because of heavy local pressure. In due process of mail he was informed that the pledge must be forthcoming, and that if he could not see that it was sent, they would find a man for the place who would. Is this not embryonic Popery? When a Missionary Society adds to its legitimate work that of a pulpit supply company, ousting men who will not do its bidding, and giving their places to others who will, in principle, what is the difference between that and the work of Rome? The people with God’s truth in their heads and hearts must rule, or the devil will ruin.

The elders of the church are all equals *officially*; but in order to the greatest efficiency in their work, they should have a simple organization, consisting of a president and secretary, and such rules of procedure as are necessary for such a body. Our representatives in



the state and national legislatures are equals officially, but they find it necessary to organize. In the old church at Bethany, Virginia, the eldership was composed of Alexander Campbell, Robert Richardson and Robert Milligan, with Mr. Campbell as president. In every body of men there are natural and educational differences in men, fitting them for the different phases of their common work. And so, let the eldership see that there is a division of labor. One man rules well, – let him be president. A skillful presiding officer, in the dispatch of business, and in the suppression of mischief-makers, is of great value. Another is skillful in keeping records, let him be your secretary. How often, when looking over the records of the congregation for business or historical purposes, we see the need of a faithful and efficient secretary. Often the deed to property is beclouded because of this inefficiency. Another mixes and mingles well with the people. He knows just how to admonish the erring, to encourage the despondent, to comfort the sorrowing, – let his be “the house to house” (Acts 20:20) ministry used by Paul in Ephesus. The right man in this particular ministry is of inestimable worth to the church. Another is “apt to teach,” – let him be in charge of the Bible school. Another is strong as a laborer “in word and doctrine,” – let him be your preacher, breaking the bread of life to the starving masses.

How are these men thus working for the church, to be supported? Alexander Campbell answers this question as follows:

“Elders must be supported by their congregations, and that according to the usual principles of justice where service is rendered. ‘The laborer is worthy of his *hire*,’ and ‘who goeth to warfare any time at his own charges?’ What right has a congregation to devote their *own* time to their own private ends and uses, and then ask the elder to sacrifice *his* to their service free of compensation? A congregation may not need the whole time of all the eldership – nor, indeed, the whole time of one member; yet so much service as they need they ought to have and pay for.... We do not teach our own children, nor do we rule over ourselves in the state; we appoint teachers and

rulers, and pay them for their services. ‘*Know ye not, brethren, that they who wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar?*’”

Here is the Bible truth of the modern and much-perverted idea of “the pastor.” He is not an officer of the church different from the eldership, for all of them are pastors; but because of special gifts, he is laboring in word and doctrine – giving his time to preaching. The obligations and responsibilities of an elder are his, whatever we may call him. “His field of labor,” says Milligan, “extends no farther than the limits of his own congregation. To preach the Gospel to the heathen is no part of the elder’s office; and to rule over other congregations would be usurpation. The elder who leaves his own church and goes to another, enters it simply as a private member. Just as the Governor of Kentucky would have no rights in Ohio beyond the rights of citizenship.”

This is the ideal congregation, so far as the plurality of the eldership is concerned; there must be two or more elders. But in a small congregation, where there is only one man fitted for the position, it would seem wise, for the time being, to have but one elder. The matter of *qualifications* is more important than the matter of *numbers*. “To appoint men without Bible qualifications,” says Isaac Errett, “merely for the sake of a plurality, has always seemed to us a strangely perverted zeal for Scriptural order.”

## CHAPTER V

### ELECTION OF ELDERS

How are elders chosen? To those who would see the apostolic church restored, this is a question of importance. They are anxious to heed the admonition to Moses, when building the tabernacle, that he be careful to “make all things according to the pattern shown him in the mount” (Heb. 8:5). If Jehovah was careful about the building of this material structure, we may be sure that we are not left without sufficient instructions as to the building of the church. The point involved here is important, for most of the controversies about church organization have come from the erroneous and dangerous idea that there is no apostolic model, and hence the question is to be decided by the emergencies of the times and the good sense of the saints. In this, as in all important matters, let the appeal be “to the law and to the testimony” (Isa. 8:20).

There is no New Testament record of the election of elders. We are told that Paul and Barnabas had *ordained* elders at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:21-23); and Titus was left in Crete to set things in order, and to *ordain* elders in every city (Tit. 1:5); but not a word is given as to how these officers were elected. But this is not an admission that there is no light on the subject. The light is elsewhere, and we must look it up.

#### ***Example Of The Jerusalem Church***

“In those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, *look ye out among you* seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

“And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.”

If there was ever a case when the selection of officers for a church might with safety have been committed to the hands of others, it was here. The entire college of apostles was present, and being under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, their selection would have been free from error, and satisfactory to the people. There was serious friction, and party spirit would be aroused to the hurt of the church unless matters were wisely handled. And all had confidence in the wisdom and impartiality of the apostles. “Surely,” says Milligan, “to the eye of sense and finite reason, the shortest and best way to settle the whole matter would seem to be that the apostles themselves should choose and appoint men to wait on the poor and needy.” But they did nothing of the kind. The choosing of her officers was the work of the church, and they would in no way interfere with that choice.

Here we learn how the deacons of the church at Jerusalem were elected. And since the principle is the same in the election of other officers, we also learn how elders are elected. This one example, directed by inspired men, and occurring in their immediate presence, should settle for all time the question of how to choose church officers.

### ***Example Of The Churches At Derbe And Lystra***

Acts 16:1, 2: “Then came he [Paul] to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, who was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek, *who was well reported of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium.*”

Timothy was a young man of promise, and Paul, always on the lookout for such men to go with him in his great work as an evangelist, inquires as to his standing at home, and finding him “well reported of,” selects him for his companion and helper. This

incident strongly emphasizes the fact that the voice of the people should be heard when the officers of the church are selected. Not only deacons, whose work is local, but evangelists, whose mission is to go abroad and do a general work, were thus chosen. And in the case of the latter a plurality of churches should join in the recommendation. This rule should be rigidly observed today, for it would often save the church humiliation and injury. The precocious youth, gifted mainly with self-conceit and the “gift of gab,” would not be allowed to take upon himself the work of an evangelist, without either recommendation or ordination. This would be hard on the “boy evangelist,” but good for the church of God.

### ***Example Of The Corinthian Church***

1 Cor. 16:3: “When I [Paul] come, *whomsoever you approve by your letters*, them will I send to bring your liberality to Jerusalem.” Here we see that the primitive churches selected their agents for any special work they might have to do. Paul, though the chief man in the kingdom, and possessed of a miraculous endowment of the Spirit, would do nothing to interfere with the rights and responsibilities of the church. (See 2 Cor. 8:18, 19, 22, 23.)

### ***Election of Elders Today***

This evidence seems sufficient for our purpose. If the churches, under the immediate supervision of inspired men, elected their own deacons, evangelists and inspired messengers, surely they are competent to elect their elders.

In the election of church officers prudence and “sanctified common sense” are all-important in the matter of details. In a well-organized congregation, the officers, after prayer and consultation among themselves, and with other good and wise men and women, should recommend such persons as are fitted for official positions. But in their recommendation there must be no ground for a charge of favoritism, or the suspicion that any one has been “railroaded” into office. In matters so sacred there should be nothing like electioneering or “wire-pulling.” There are many in large churches too young to act wisely in this matter except as aided by others, and some, though older, are not well enough acquainted

with the membership, to make a proper choice.

In unorganized churches, the evangelist, after prayerful conference with the wisest and best people, should have a committee composed mainly of the older and more thoughtful brethren, to suggest the names. By all means avoid promiscuous nominations in open meeting, for this is Satan's favorite place to make trouble.

For what length of time should an elder be elected? The Book being silent on this point, "sanctified common sense," free from dogmatism, must guide us. There are two answers often heard, representing the two extremes. One is: "Once an elder, always an elder;" and the other favors electing them for a term of years: one-third for three years, one-third for two years, and one-third for one year, thus always having in office two-thirds of the board, men of experience. As regards the first theory, it would be just as sensible, speaking of the "preacher," to say, "Once a preacher, always a preacher." When the preacher ceases to be effective for good, there should be a change; and so of the elder. This first theory is sometimes pleaded by the very man who, of all others, ought to resign. He is self-willed, and is lording it over the congregation like a pope. His will must be supreme. He is pre-eminently the "ruling elder," and frequently in proportion to his ignorance is his assumption of authority. Here is an actual note from one of this class:

"Bro. \_\_\_\_\_: We can't hire Bro. \_\_\_\_\_  
to preach for us. Some of the members wants him,  
but we won't have no man what parts his hair in the  
middle. Very truly,  
" \_\_\_\_\_, Rulin' Elder."

What must be done in a case like this? The man must be removed, or the church will be destroyed. The people who made him an elder can unmake him, and they should proceed, without loss of time, to do so. The thing created is not greater than the creator. A large petition, asking for his resignation, ought to be sufficient. But if not, charges should be brought against him, and he should be

tried. Paul said to Timothy, “Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19). This shows that an elder is subject to “accusation,” with the single wise precaution that their rights as officials in the church should be carefully guarded. An elder, in the faithful discharge of duty, is liable to give offense to wicked men by his rebukes of sin; and his position in the church is such that the welfare of the entire congregation may be involved in the disposition of his case, hence this precaution.

J. W. McGarvey says: “It often happens that in the course of his career an elder falls into bad repute, sometimes unjustly, but oftener justly. Many churches are now languishing under the incubus of an eldership composed partly of such material, and they can never flourish till relieved by the death or resignation of the unfortunate party. It is too hazardous, in such cases, to wait for death to bring desired relief, and voluntary resignations are least likely to occur with just that class of men. It is the duty, therefore, of all churches thus afflicted to call upon the party to resign the office. It is a duty of a most delicate nature, requiring all the wisdom and prudence of which the leading men of the church are capable, but it must, at all hazards, be done.”

The least possible publicity in the case is best. Avoid public accusations and trials, if possible to end the trouble without them. The quietest way of reaching the result is always the best. Often an arbitration committee of wise men capable of judging between brethren (1 Cor. 6: 5) would settle the matter. But if necessary, the case should go before the eldership of sister churches (Acts 15:1-6).

As regards the second theory, the most serious objection to it is that it requires annual elections, and thus gives to evil-minded men choice and frequent opportunities for getting in their evil work. Perhaps, on the whole, the best plan would be to elect them for life, on good behavior, subject to a change at any time according to the desires of either party. The wisdom of this plan has been abundantly manifested in the relation of the preacher and the church. When the right man is in the right place, the longer he stays (so long as he is able to do the work) the stronger he becomes. This is true of

statesmen, doctors, lawyers, merchants, teachers and preachers, and why should it not be true of elders? This writer, after a third of a century in the pulpit, always employed on this plan, would give it the heartiest endorsement; and his testimony would but echo the sentiments of most of the preachers in the most important pulpits of the land.



## CHAPTER VI

### ORDINATION OF ELDERS

The elders having been duly elected by the church, they should next be ordained, or set apart to their new work by a solemn and impressive ceremony. By common consent this seems to be appropriate on such occasions. The President of the nation, the Governors of States, the presidents of colleges, etc., are thus inducted into office. When Jehovah introduced Jesus of Nazareth to the world as his Son it was in connection with an ordinance which he made permanent as a part of all inductions into the kingdom (Matt. 3:13-17; 28:19, 20).

Does the Book throw any light on this subject? In the answer to this question there is not perfect harmony. The discord, however, is not great, and no serious results have followed. Yet, it exists, and it ought, if possible, to be removed. The precise point of difference is as to whether elders should be ordained by *prayer, fasting and the imposition of hands*.

We look to the Scriptures for light:

1. Acts 6:5, 6: “And the saying [that the people should select their deacons] pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, whom they set before the apostles. *And when they had they laid their hands on them.*”

Here we see that prayer and the imposition of hands were a part of the ordination ceremony of the deacons in the church at Jerusalem.

2. Acts 13:1-3: “Now there were in the church at Antioch certain prophets and teachers: as Barnabas, and Simon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto

I have called them. *And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away*”

In addition to prayer and the imposition of hands, as seen in the ordination of the deacons at Jerusalem, we here find that fasting was a part of the ceremony of the ordination of Barnabas and Saul.

3. Acts 14:23: “And when they [Saul and Barnabas] had ordained them elders in every church, *and had prayed, with fasting*, they commended them unto the Lord, on whom they believed.”

In this passage Luke only mentions fasting and prayer.

4. 1 Tim. 4:14: “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, *with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery*”

Here only one item – the laying on of hands – is mentioned.

Since these four passages are all different in their details, some have concluded that there was no uniform practice in the matter of ordination in the New Testament church. But this is a mistake, and in the light of a parallel case, the reader will see it as such.

In the Commission under which the Savior sent out the apostles to convert the world, we learn that man must believe, repent and be baptized in order to the remission of sins, and induction into the church. (See Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46, 47.) In the first sermon preached under this Commission, it is said: “Now when they heard this [Peter’s sermon], they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Peter said unto them, *Repent, and be baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37, 38).

Here only two items of the Commission – Repentance and Baptism – are mentioned.

In Acts 16:30-33 we have an account of the conversion of the Philippian jailer. At the hour of midnight Paul and Silas prayed to God and sang his praises. The Father heard their worship, and came to the rescue of his faithful followers. He shook the prison with an earthquake, and the doors flew open, making it possible for the prisoners to escape. The jailer seeing this, and supposing they had escaped, and being responsible for them, was just in the act of taking his own life, when Paul called to him, telling him to do himself no harm, for they were all there; then he called for Paul and Silas, and brought them out of the prison, and said unto them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was *baptized*, he and all his straightway."

Here only two of the three items of the Commission – Faith and Baptism – are mentioned.

In Acts 22:16, Paul, giving an account of his own conversion, says the Lord appeared to him on the Damascus road while he was rushing on toward that city for the purpose of destroying the church there; and a great light shined about him, and a voice said unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And he fell to the ground, and asked who it was that was speaking to him; and when he learned that it was Jesus, he cried to him, saying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He was told to go to Damascus, and he would be told what he must do. He did so. And after three days of fasting and prayer, Ananias came and preached to him, closing with these words: "And now why tarriest thou? *arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins calling on the name of the Lord.*"

In this notable conversion only one of the three items – Baptism – is mentioned.

To the superficial reader there is no harmony here; and he is liable to conclude that the Bible is a book without system or order: a heterogeneous jumble of contradictions. But to the careful Bible student no such conclusion is possible. He sees in the circumstances

under which these instructions were given ample reason for not expressing what was well understood. At Pentecost Faith is not mentioned, but it was clearly implied. The jailer, being a heathen, had to be taught everything. And in the case of Saul, his Faith and Repentance were implied, and only his Baptism declared. Thus we see that in all cases the Commission was carried out to the letter.

The same rule of interpretation applied to the passages on ordination, shows that the officers of the church should be ordained, or set apart to their special work, with *prayer, fasting, and the imposition of hands*. With the seven deacons we find *prayer, and the laying on of hands*; with Barnabas and Saul, we find *prayer and the laying on of hands*; in the ordination of elders by Saul and Barnabas, we find *fasting, prayer, and the imposition of hands*; and the case of Timothy, we find the *imposition of hands*.

And so it seems safe to infer that as in the case of the induction of the sinner into the kingdom of God there are three distinct requirements; so, in the induction of saints into the official positions of the church, there is also a sacred and solemn ceremony threefold in its character.

The ordination service, when a good man is called by his brethren to the high and holy work of the eldership, should be made of great value to both him and them. The congregation, fasting, assembles for this special purpose. After songs, prayers and Bible reading, all deeply devotional, someone talks about the character and work of an elder – a work superior to that of any earthly king; and another impresses the church with her obligations to stand by him, as he strives by example and precept to lead them in the way of life. Then, with the hands of holy men upon his head, the solemn service is closed with prayer. What man fit for such a work, and what church fit for the work of such a man, could fail to be benefited by such a service?

The ordination of C. L. Loos to the work of an evangelist is well-nigh a modern illustration of primitive ordination. Having spent four years in Bethany College, and having given full proof of his Christian character, as well as his ability to labor in word and

doctrine, and being of good report in the churches near Bethany, he was, on the first Lord's Day of December, 1849, formally set apart to this work by prayer, and the imposition of the hands of the eldership of the Bethany and Wellsburg Churches. After the character and responsibility of the work had been presented to the congregation, with the necessity of cordial concurrence and co-operation on their part, the young man came forward, and kneeling, bowed his head, while the presbytery laid their hands upon it. The entire congregation rose and stood reverently while all joined in the prayer for Heaven's blessings upon the labors of him whom they thus authorized to go forth to a lost world with the glad tidings of salvation. A charge, solemn and impressive, was then addressed to the young preacher, in which the work of an evangelist was set forth with earnestness and power. After this all the people joined in singing the hymn beginning –

“Go with thy servant, Lord,  
His every step attend;  
All needful help to him afford.  
And bless him to the end.”

Surely, after this, Bro. Loos must have felt as never before the dignity and sacredness of the work to which he was to devote his life; and if, at any time afterward, in his long and fruitful ministry, he has been tempted to give it up, the memory of this solemn ordination service would have been a mighty appeal to persevere faithful to the end.

Let all who contemplate entering the public ministry of the church study the step well before they take it. Too often it is taken up and laid down with as little concern as they would that of law, medicine or merchandise. Under the impulse of zeal, but without counting the cost, they begin it, but feel no obligation to continue longer than it is pleasant or profitable to them. Like John Mark (Acts 13:13), when the way becomes rough and dangers multiply, they turn back. There is no recollection of a solemn covenant entered into before God and men in which they pledged themselves to be true until death, impelling them to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. They are unable to share Paul's feelings when he said,

“Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.”

As this question is still in controversy, we close with the testimony of two men whose words will command the respect of all who know them. W. K. Pendleton, one of the most reliable of men, says: “It [ordination] was unquestionably done in primitive times, by the imposition of hands and prayer, either by a presbytery or an evangelist. The apostles, indeed, set the first example of the practice in the Christian church in the ordination of the seven, to minister on tables in Jerusalem. The church at Ephesus ordained, by this form, even an apostle, and set apart Paul and Barnabas to the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them, by prayer, and the imposition of hands. Timothy, it seems, was thus set apart to his office, and as he was commanded *to lay hands suddenly on no man*, no doubt, he, in turn, practiced a like ceremony in the organization of the churches which he planted. We regard, therefore, the practice and example of the primitive church on this point as unquestionably made out.” Alexander Campbell says: “Bishops should be solemnly set apart to the work assigned them by the imposition of hands, either by an evangelist or by the existing eldership, accompanied with prayer and fasting.” Speaking at another time on this subject, he further says: “The apostles did express their concurrence with the people’s choice by an act of this sort (imposition of hands), and when congregations were fully set in order there was always a plurality of elders, or a presbytery, instituted in each congregation, who always did express their concurrence with the brethren’s call by the joint imposition of hands.”

It will be seen from the testimony of these eminent authorities that ordination was practiced by the apostolic churches, and that it consisted in *prayer, fasting and the laying on of hands*. It is true that Mr. Pendleton does not mention fasting, but this writer believes it implied by him. And if not, he fails to follow fully the teachings of the Book. But Mr. Campbell is clear in his endorsement, not only of ordination, but of the three items of which it consisted.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **NECESSITY, PURPOSE AND SPIRIT OF DISCIPLINE**

Discipline means training, and in its broadest sense, includes everything essential to the full development of Christian character. But in its narrow sense it pertains specially to the righting of wrongs. In its broad sense it may be called formative discipline, and in the narrow sense, corrective discipline. Having already in Chapter III discussed it in the first sense, we now call attention to its secondary meaning.

#### **NECESSITY OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

The analogies of life show the absolute necessity of discipline. If neglected in the home, children are sure to become worthless, or worse. If neglected in the school, idleness, ignorance and evil must follow. If neglected in business, bankruptcy is inevitable. If neglected in the State, property, liberty and life are imperiled. If neglected in the army, it becomes an unorganized mob, and an easy prey to almost any foe. If neglected in the vineyard or in the orchard, in the flock or on the farm, bad results always follow. Evil is always present where good is trying to grow. Grass and weeds grow in every field and garden, and that without cultivation. And when the good seed is sown in the heart Satan is always near, to steal it away, or to pervert it in its growth.

If, therefore, we cannot have a good son or daughter, or a good scholar, or a good business, or a good soldier, or a good farm or flock without discipline, it is not strange that it is impossible to have stalwart Christian character without it. Paul says, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27).

#### **DESIGN OF DISCIPLINE**

The purpose or design of discipline is threefold:

### ***For The Good Of The Offender***

A father, loving and wise, sees his son wandering away. He admonishes, he entreats, he warns; but all in vain. The boy regards him not, and rushes on toward ruin. What must he do? What can he do? There is but one thing to do: with tears in his eyes and sorrow in his heart and strength in his will, he must resort to corrective discipline. In this way our Father deals with his children. When Israel was wayward and wicked and would not hear or heed the messengers sent in mercy to them, but despised and slew them, at last the Lord allowed them to be carried into captivity, where, in a furnace of affliction for seventy years, they saw their sin and turned again to God and were saved. And so the church today, not willingly, but of necessity, disciplines her offenders. But the first object is always “to gain thy brother” (Matt. 18:15). When one is “overtaken in a fault,” the spiritually minded are to “restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Gal. 6:1). And when thus restored, we “save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins” (Jas 5:19, 20). Note these three strong words: “to gain,” “restore,” and “save a soul from death.” The reclamation, the restoration, and the salvation of the erring, so far as he is concerned, is the supreme object of discipline. He is not to be treated as an enemy, but entreated as an erring brother. Many Christians with dying consciences could be saved by such discipline.

### ***For The Good Of The Church***

To save the body we often have to amputate a diseased limb. The law of self-preservation demands this. And to save the church, the body of Christ, it is sometimes necessary to cut off a sick member.

It is an awful thing for a man to work the ruin of the church for which the Savior died, and the Master has pronounced an awful curse on such. “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy” (1 Cor. 3:17). Men who are making no effort to live the Christian life have no business in the church. They are neither imparting nor receiving good; but, on the other hand, both they and the church are being injured. In their hypocrisy their own lives become worse day by day, and their evil influence, like leaven,



spreads through the church, and leaves poison at every point.

An impure church can never represent the pure Christ. She is to be without “spot or wrinkle,” and free from “blemish.” She is to be “a city set upon a hill, whose light cannot be hid” (Matt. 5:14). She is to be the “chaste virgin of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2).

### ***For The Good Of The World***

The most formidable barrier in the way of the progress of the church is not open infidelity: bombardment from the outside, but the inconsistency of her membership: traitors within the walls. An open-eyed world, looking for a practical rather than a theoretical church, sees this, and decides that there is nothing there for them, and so decline to enter her fold. How often, when dealing with such men, are we met with the undeniable declaration that they are as good as Mr. A. or Mr. B., prominent men in the church. They are free from drink, profanity and hurtful lusts, and they pay one hundred cents on the dollar. In their eyes the candlestick has lost its light and the salt its savor.

In most cases where such men, sincerely desiring to become Christians, but hindered in this way, hesitate and halt, they could be induced to go forward but for this great stumbling-block. They are not reading the Bible so much as they are reading its professed friends. The church to them is literally the “epistle known and read of all men” (2 Cor. 3:2). If they could see the standard of righteousness lifted again to the lofty plane where the Lord placed it, and could witness a firm but kind discipline, cutting off those who were making no effort to reproduce the Christ life, the effect would be wholesome. After Achan’s death – a severe case of discipline – Israel rallied from defeat and marched to victory (Josh. 7:1-26). And immediately following the death of Ananias and Sapphira – another severe case of discipline in the New Testament times – Luke says that “great fear came upon the church,... and believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:1-14).

Discipline is the most difficult and the most dreaded work of the

eldership. It will likely make enemies, not only of the disciplined, but also of his family, and a circle of friends both in the church and in the world; and the man devoid of a strong combination of conscience and courage will fail at this point. But he who possesses this combination will do his duty regardless of consequences, and in after-life the consciousness of duty done will make his memory sweet, and fill his soul with songs of joy. Duty frowns only when we flee from it; follow it and its face is wreathed in smiles. We can no more choose our duties than a soldier can choose his. It will often be our duty to do what we would not, and to leave undone what we would. Abraham became the founder of “a great and mighty nation,” and was known as the “father of the faithful and the friend of God” because he “commanded his children and his household” (Gen. 18:16-19), and Eli brought down the condemnation of Heaven upon himself and his sons because he would not do this (1 Sam. 2:27-30). “Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13).

## **THE SPIRIT OF DISCIPLINE**

The manner in which we do things is second only in importance to the thing done. Our words and actions will attract or repel according to the spirit which characterizes them. We can grant a request in such a way as to alienate forever the beneficiary, or we can so deny him as to make him a friend for all time. Stem work does not demand a stem manner, but just the reverse. The parent who punishes his child in anger and haste deserves the condemnation of God and man. In this work the eldership must be tender as love, wise as serpents and harmless as doves. There must be nothing hasty or harsh in withdrawing fellowship from a member. Every reasonable effort to save him must be exhausted before we come to this. It is a serious thing to lose an arm or a leg, and we have to be fully assured that it cannot be saved before we submit to the surgeon’s knife. The spirit in which fellowship is withdrawn is sometimes the worst part of the whole sad affair. Surely, if the church ever needs a double portion of the Spirit of Christ it is when she comes to the solemn and awful act of excluding one of her members.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DEALING WITH OFFENSES

Church discipline has to do with two kinds of offenses: private or personal, and public or general.

#### *Private Offenses*

The rule for dealing with private offenses is given by the Savior as follows: “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen and a publican” (Matt. 18:15-17).

This may well be called a second Golden Rule, for it is so simple and comprehensive, and so righteous and reasonable, that it commends itself to everyone who wants to do right. It involves four steps, and these should be taken promptly, for delays here are peculiarly dangerous. Many an amputated limb could have been saved by prompt and skillful action, and many lost souls could have been saved by a speedy application of this Golden Rule.

The first step is: “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” Many are the errors at this point. We often tell of the offense, but not to *him*; and thus it is published abroad and made doubly hard to deal with. And often, conscious of innocence in the matter, we persuade ourselves that there is no obligation upon us to go to the other party, but that we do well to wait in a kindly spirit for him to come to us and confess his wrong. But this is to impugn the wisdom of the Lord, and to rebel against his command. And, besides, it only requires a moment’s reflection to realize that the innocent party, clear-visioned and stronger because of his innocence, has the first and greater obligation upon him. His poor brother has been wounded and weakened by sin, and his vision is clouded, and hence is not in so good condition to do his duty as the innocent party. Let it be emphasized that the wrong is not to be

published in the papers, nor even discussed among the brethren; but face to face, and alone with God, the two must meet and talk it over, and, if possible, settle it between themselves.

But if this effort fails, the second step must be taken. "If he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." Much wisdom should be exercised in the selection of these witnesses. The wrong men will ruin everything, but the right men may save all. Be sure that they are fair-minded, peace-loving and Spirit-filled. Then, in their hearing the case is to be gone over again, and another effort made to settle it.

But if the offender is still incorrigible, then the third step must be taken: "Tell it unto the church."

And if he will not hear the church, the fourth and final step must be taken: "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

If this rule was faithfully and kindly followed, it is safe to say that nine-tenths of our church troubles would never be known to the church or to the world. But so many will not follow it. A man in ignorance or in perversity seeks to ignore the first two steps, and bring a purely personal matter into the church. What shall be done? Must the church hear him? Here is work for the eldership. By no means. He must be shown his duty and urged to do it, and if he refuses, he must be dealt with by the church for contempt of the authority of the Lord.

Or, suppose that the offended party silently submits to the wrongs inflicted, would that meet the requirements of the Savior? It would not; for in that case he would not be making the proper effort to save his brother. His patience is beautiful, and his lack of resentment is worthy of all commendation, but his duty to his erring brother must not be neglected.

But supposing that neither party will do his duty, and the trouble continues, then what? The church herself must take hold of the case and settle it according to the law of Christ, and they must be to her as

a heathen man and publican. The Jew had no dealings with these people, and so persons who thus defy the church and bring her good name into disrepute must be cut off from her communion and must so remain until by penitence they can be restored.

### ***Public Offenses***

Public or general offenses are different, and they call for different treatment. They are not against single individuals, but against the whole church. The Book is clear on this point. Fornicators, the covetous, the idolater, the railer, the drunkard and the extortioner (1 Cor. 5: 11, 12) must be put away. The idle and disorderly (2 Thess. 3:10, 11) are to be withdrawn from. The heretic, after proper admonition, is to be rejected (Tit. 3:10). The man who is false to the doctrine of Christ is not to be received into our homes, or bidden Godspeed (2 John 10, 11). From these and other Scriptures we learn that there are many public offenses which need the prompt and vigorous discipline of the church. These grave offenses must not be winked at, for they blight the beauty of the church, mar her harmony, and rob her of her prestige and power in the world. A vigilant eldership would no more allow such evils in the church than a shepherd would allow wolves in his flock.

In 1 Cor. 5:1-5 Paul tells us how to deal with a public offender whose life was injuring the church. This was a notorious case. His crime was that of incest, a sin upon which even the Gentiles looked with scorn. He had taken his stepmother from his father and made her his wife. She was not a Christian, or Paul would have had her excluded also. The “bride of Christ” had her white robes tarnished, and her onward progress in saving souls hindered, and the apostles called on the church at Corinth to protect her by casting from her fold this vile offender. His case was notorious and unbearable; he was polluted and polluting; he was no longer fit for the companionship of the saints, and should be cast out into the regions of darkness with Satan. “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might not be taken away from among you. For I

verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath done this deed: in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

The results in this case were altogether good. The church was vindicated and her lost prestige and power returned, and the man himself was saved. Brought face to face with his awful sin, and cast out from the pure, as unfit for their companionship, and made to realize that the only suitable habitation for him was with Satan, like the prodigal son, “he came to himself,” repented and returned to God, and was restored to his place in the church.

Paul (2 Cor. 2:6-8), seeing that his punishment was “sufficient,” and that without the forgiveness of his brethren he was in danger of being “swallowed up by overmuch sorrow,” urged them “to confirm their love toward him.”

In the house of God everything should be done decently and in order, hence a suggestion as to how to proceed in a case of public discipline may not be out of place. If a member is guilty of any of the sins mentioned in the foregoing Scriptures, or any kindred crime, the good of both the church and the individual demands that the eldership should lose no time in dealing with the case. And when they have done their full duty, and find themselves forced to the painful conviction that the offender should be cut off from the congregation, they must report to the church. And when the congregation is convened, with all tenderness, but with firmness and impartiality, they should briefly recite the facts in the case, with the evidence by which they are supported, and the Scriptures bearing upon them, accompanied by a recital of their own previous actions in the investigations, when the congregation should rise, and while standing, *should solemnly execute the law* upon him who has violated it, the service closing with a prayer in which all remember at the throne of God the poor man so sadly in need of the help of others.

Let it be understood that this action on the part of the congregation is not a *vote* to decide as to whether the man shall be excluded or not, but an *affirmation* of the action of the eldership. This eldership has been placed by our King in the church as the ruling power, and so long as the ruling is in harmony with his law it must be upheld by the people. The action of Paul in the case of the incestuous man is in accord with this suggestion. He did not, by the aid of his miraculous powers, pass upon it, but he *judged* it, implying investigation; just such work as these elders have done, and after this investigation he called upon the church to *execute his judgment*. The eldership, composed of material peculiarly fitted for such work, being men of age, experience and wisdom, and being both *teachers* and *rulers*, constitutes the safest tribunal known to men for this difficult but all-important work.

W. K. Pendleton says:

“When a judge declares a man guilty of murder and pronounces against him the sentence of death, he is *legally* dead; but it is not till the sheriff or proper officer has *executed* the sentence that he is *actually* dead. The concurrent action of both of these officers is necessary to give efficiency to the arm of justice; but in granting each his proper part, do not let us confound their respective duties. Because the sheriff must execute the decision of the judge in order to give it effect, and it amounts to nothing without this concurrent action, we must not conclude that it is the sheriff’s duty to *judge* the case, and decide what shall be done in the premises; and so, because the *whole church, collectively*, is called upon to give efficiency to the eldership, we must not conceive that this is to review their decision and judge the case anew.”

Alexander Campbell says:

“As a sovereign preventive of difficulties in churches, an able, discreet and righteous eldership is one of Heaven’s own ordination – an indispensable

prerequisite to the good order, peace, health and prosperity of a community. This eldership must be devoted in heart, and set apart to this business under the solemn vows of fidelity to the King and his kingdom. When this eldership is in full and harmonious discharge of its duties to the Lord and his people, it must be submitted to in all righteous decisions on the part of the community that appointed it.... The election to rule is, on the part of the electors, an engagement to submit to the elected. On any other hypothesis an election or ordination is a force.... There never was a community that got along peaceably and profitably for any length of time that presumed to settle all matters of discipline by a public vote in a public assembly. ... No family, church or State could be long kept in order, in harmony and in love under such an economy.... Now, if it be no disparagement to our rank as citizens of the State that we submit to the officers whom we ourselves have created, can it be any diminution of our Christian dignity to obey our own ecclesiastical rulers who, under the Lord, are over us for our good?"

There are several objections urged against church discipline. For want of space, we only examine the main one, assured if that cannot stand the others will also fail.

The parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43) is claimed to be directly against the whole theory of excluding bad men from the church. And it must be admitted that a superficial reading would leave this impression. Bad seed were sown in the same field with good, and tares sprang up by the side of the wheat. The servants came to the master wanting to pull out the tares. And he said, "Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." And so these men say that the separation of the bad from the



good is not to take place here, but at the judgment

By a careful examination of the text we find that the “field” in which the seed was sown and in which the tares and wheat were found, was not the *church*, but the *world*. “The field is the world,” says Jesus. Whatever, then, is said about the destruction of the tares is applicable to the *world*, and not to the *church*. It, therefore, has absolutely no connection with the question of church discipline. The purpose of the parable was to show the true relation of the church to the world. There was to be no war of extermination. The sword of the Spirit, and not the sword of Caesar, was to be the weapon of warfare; and every effort from that day to this to extend the kingdom of heaven by means of the sword is a violation of this principle. The idea is toleration as against persecution, and a wise patience with the wicked who are always about us.

Those who thus misinterpret the parable lose sight of four important points:

1. That church discipline is taught in other parts of the New Testament (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Thess. 3:6). These passages show that both Christ and his apostles taught it in language too clear to be misunderstood.
2. They misunderstand the primary purpose of church discipline. It is for the saving of men, and not for their destruction. Sometimes it is necessary to cast a man out, but even then it is in the hope that “his soul may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”
3. They fail to see that those who are to pluck up the tares and bind them for burning are not the officers of the church, but the angels of God.
4. They also fail to recognize the fundamental and never-to-be-forgotten fact that when the Lord interprets a parable that is an end of controversy to the true disciple.

We will hear some eminent men:

*Philip Schaff:* “This passage must not be abused and misunderstood so as to undermine discipline, which is elsewhere solemnly enjoined by Christ and the apostles.”

*W. M. Taylor:* “Church discipline is clearly enjoined by many passages of the New Testament, and no interpretation of any parable may be put against that.”

*Robert Milligan:* “Nothing can be more plainly taught in the Scriptures than that it is the duty of the church to withdraw her fellowship from every member who persists in a disorderly course of conduct.”

*Isaac Errett:* “The reapers will gather the wheat from among the tares; but don’t forget that the field is the world, not the church, in which this separation is made.”

*Alexander Campbell:* “To cut off an offender is good; to cure him is better; but to prevent him falling is best of all. The Christian spirit and system alike inculcate all vigilance in preventing; all expedition in healing offenses, and all firmness in removing incorrigible offenders.”

## CHAPTER IX

### APPEALS

The right of appeal is inherent in human life, and is fundamental in all good government. In the government of the family, the school, the State, everywhere, this right must be recognized, or all such government is both a mockery and a tyranny. The oppressed, the persecuted and the neglected must have a hearing. In the case of the first murder (Gen. 4:1-15), while Abel's lips were silent in death, his blood appealed to God from the ground, and the appeal was heard and heeded, and the oppressor was punished. And John says (Rev. 6:9, 10), when the fifth seal was opened: "I saw under the altar the souls of them who were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" And so the Book opens and closes with the appeals of the oppressed. And all along between these two far-separated periods the same picture is often seen.

And yet there are those who say that when the local church passes sentence on an offender it is final, and henceforth he must be as "a heathen man and a publican." If so, that local congregation ought to be infallible, for supremacy of authority, without infallibility, would be a terror from which all thoughtful men would instinctively flee, and the church, instead of being a magnet, drawing men to her loving bosom, would be a monster, driving them farther and farther away. No intelligent man should be expected to surrender this natural right. And if the New Testament church in her discipline does not recognize and preserve this right, she fails to meet a universal want of the world, and thus shows that she is not divine.

Alexander Campbell, discussing this question in 1841, lays down five propositions to which we call special attention:

1. "The kingdom of Christ, sometimes called his church, is one great community composed of all the particular communities and individual persons that have

acknowledged and received Jesus of Nazareth as the Son and Messiah of God – as the only Head, King, Lawgiver and Arbiter of angels and men.

2. “All the particular congregations that compose this great congregation, this general assembly, called ‘the kingdom of God,’ ‘the holy nation,’ are responsible to one another and to the Lord, as much as the individual members of any one of them are to one another and to the Lord.
3. “Congregations therefore are under certain obligations and owe certain duties to one another, the faithful discharge of which is indispensable to that free and cordial communion and co-operation essential to the holiness of the church and the triumph of the Gospel in the world.
4. “Among these obligations and duties are, the maintenance of the doctrine and discipline of Christ’s kingdom, and a due regard for all the acts and decisions of one another; because a neglect of the former and a disparagement of the latter would necessarily destroy that union, communion and co-operation essential to the designs of Christ’s kingdom.
5. “When, then, any particular congregation offends against the constitution of the Messiah’s kingdom by denying the doctrine, by neglecting the discipline, or by maladministration of the affairs of Christ’s church, essentially affecting the well-being of individual members or other congregations, then said church is to be judged by the eldership of other churches, or by some other tribunal than her own, as an accused or delinquent member of a particular congregation is to be tried by the constituted eldership of his own congregation.”

The only one of these propositions liable to rejection is the last one. The other four will meet with so little objection that universal acceptance may be claimed for them. And so we address ourselves to a defense of the fifth and last proposition.

When Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build my church," he did not mean a local church. A local church is *a* church, but it is not *the* church. A local church is made up of the faithful followers of the Christ in a single community, but *the* church is composed of all such followers in all communities. Texas is an important part of the United States, but it is only a part of this great nation; and it is so related to the other parts that it has no right to do or permit anything within her local limits that will injure these other parts.

Alexander Campbell says: "No community called a church is absolutely independent of *the* church of God, but amenable to the whole church for its administration of its affairs."

President Milligan says: "Whenever any one of them (local churches) is in danger of being corrupted or destroyed by false teaching, maladministration, or anything else, it is the imperative duty of other churches to interfere, in a prudent way, for its safety. This is plainly and positively required by the mutual relations that they all sustain to each other as members of the body of Christ."

In the light of the advice of these two eminent men, which we will show is in strict accord with the teaching of the Book, two vital questions are settled:

1. If a local congregation has troubles which for any good cause could be better dealt with by others, she has a right to so refer them. Also, if some individual, or individuals, believe they have been mistreated by the local congregation, they have the same right Caesar often grants "a change of venue," and there are times when the church ought to do it. Where prejudice and passion run high, and personal feeling is strong, it is difficult to get justice.
2. But if the local congregation has troubles which threaten the life of the church at large, and she refuses to deal with them, then it becomes the duty of the church to interfere, and, in the spirit of the Master, and according to the law of self-preservation, to endeavor to right the wrong. If a deadly cancer should develop on the nose, and that member of the

body should neglect or refuse to take proper steps for its destruction, then the hands, the feet and the other members surely ought to do so. The church is compared to a body with Christ as the Head (1 Cor. 12:12-27).

“Every church that departs from the faith, or from the discipline of Christ’s kingdom, or that unrighteously or unwisely administers its affairs to the great detriment of individual members, a particular congregation, or the whole church of Christ, must be tried by some tribunal. Any one that pushes his notions of independency so far as to deny this, is deluded by a word which he does not understand; as much as he who makes his little borough, city or county so independent as to deny the supervision and jurisdiction of the nation, kingdom or State in which it belongs.” – *Alexander Campbell*.

The New Testament church has three tribunals for the administration of discipline:

1. The eldership of the local church (Acts 20: 28; Heb. 13:17).
2. Wise men acting as an arbitration committee (1 Cor. 7:5).
3. The elders of sister churches (Acts 15: 1-6).

The work of the eldership of the local church having been discussed already, we refer the reader to the preceding chapters.

The work of the arbitration committee is not only Scriptural, but it is reasonable, righteous, practical, and of great value. But the non-concurrence of either party stops its proceedings.

The eldership of sister churches is the Court of Appeals, so to speak, which is to pass upon such cases as may, for good reasons, be brought up for a second hearing. Fortunately, in the discussion of this third court we are not left to the abstract principle involved, however plain it may be, but we have a concrete example, setting

forth in detail the application of this principle.

The first great trouble in the church was settled by this third tribunal, as recorded by Luke in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. Up to this time violent persecutions had raged without. The enemy had been trying to overcome the church by assailing her walls and breaking down her gates. But when he finds that external violence is a failure, he attempts to reach his aim by internal dissension and strife. This incident is of special importance because it is the account of the first thing of the kind in the history of the church, and, also, because it shows how to deal with such difficulties today, for in its settlement we have the help of the apostles themselves. Let us have the story in Luke's own words:

“And certain men who came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.”

We admit that this passage has been made the proof-text of some very great errors. All manner of councils, conferences, conventions and associations have looked to it for authority. It has been tortured in ways without number, and made to teach much that is hostile to Christianity. But despite all this, it is of the utmost importance, and we must not suffer its abuse to rob us of its legitimate use.

The Pharisees had been among Christ's bitterest enemies during his personal ministry, as they were of the apostles during the first

years of the young church's history. But some of them seem not only to be in the church, but they are influential there. They came down to Antioch, the first Gentile church in the world, and attempted to bind the yoke of Judaism upon the brethren. Paul and Barnabas, being set for the defense of the Gospel, contended earnestly for the faith, like true leaders often have to do. They could not settle the matter there, and so they got it referred to Jerusalem for further investigation at the hands of the apostles and elders in the old mother church.

There were strong reasons for this appeal:

1. Jerusalem was the original church, and therefore a place of much authority in Christianity, as it had always been in Judaism.
2. Most of the apostles were there, and many Christians who had known Christ in his earthly ministry, and had often heard his teaching, and witnessed his wonderful works.
3. Paul as an apostle, having been born out of due time, would not likely be acknowledged by these Judean brethren as an apostle, but they would so recognize those at Jerusalem.

Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by other brethren representing the Antioch church, went to Jerusalem, and were cordially received by the church, the elders and the apostles; and when they reported the things that God had done with them, a meeting was appointed, "and the apostles and elders came together to *consider this matter.*" They did not come together to decide the question by a dictum from some superior authority, but to investigate it, and reach a conclusion as we would today. The church was face to face with the most difficult problem in her history, and they were grappling with it as such. The apostles were not acting under the plenary inspiration by which they did most of their work. If so, no considering and discussion would have been necessary. But for this special case they stood on the same plane with the elders, without supernatural light, and, as they sometimes did (1 Cor. 7:25), passed judgment in the matter. God saw fit at times to have these great leaders, without



special revelation, investigate and advise as other men. Their decision, after much discussion (not “disputing,” v. 7), was approved by the church (v. 22), and by the Holy Spirit (v. 28), and it was placed in the hands of chosen men, distinguished for their devotion to God (v. 25), and scattered broadcast among the brethren.

Two important deductions can be drawn from this case:

1. This is no precedent for a permanent and authoritative council in the church, such as we now see in Christendom, to which cases can be appealed regularly, much as cases are appealed to our Supreme Court. There is not the slightest intimation that these apostles, elders and the Jerusalem church claimed any ecclesiastical authority over the church at Antioch, or anywhere else. They did not claim that it was their *right* to have such cases referred to them. They were not lording it over God’s heritage. But this was a *special case*, and they were a *special council* to which it had been appealed. The whole thing was an attempt to meet a *grave emergency*, and not a precedent for a permanent court of final appeal in the kingdom of God.
2. But it is a precedent for brethren in Christ, under certain conditions, to appeal to other brethren to aid them in settling serious troubles, when they find themselves unable to settle them at home.

Alexander Campbell says:

“The fifteenth chapter of Acts establishes a principle of reference, or appeal in all difficult cases, to the presbytery of a different church or churches, and authorizes such elders to come together to consider and decide the matter. It does not institute stated, annual, biennial or triennial synods, councils or conventions, but it institutes a special conference or convention when exigencies may require.”

It is interesting to know that this address sent out on this occasion is the oldest thing in the New Testament. It is older than the Gospels, the Epistles or Revelation. It circulated first as a separate document, but was finally incorporated into the Book of Acts. It claims for itself inspiration (v. 28) and is designated by the two titles “epistles” (v. 30) and “decrees” (16:4).

## CHAPTER X

### THE LORD'S SUPPER

It is very difficult for man in the flesh to grasp a purely spiritual idea, and hence the Lord has always used material media in his teaching. This is probably not true of the angels and the redeemed in heaven; and it will not be true of us when we join them in the heavenly life, for, then, having left all of the material in the grave, we will need no such aids. Then we will "see as we are seen, and know as we are known" (1 Cor. 13:12). But for the present the picture to the eye and the sound to the ear are two of the chief gateways through which the chariot of wisdom has to approach us.

Signs and symbols are coextensive with the history of man. They were present with the first pair in Eden before their fall. During the Patriarchal age following they were used in lavish abundance. A beautiful example was that of the tabernacle, the portable place of worship during the wanderings in the wilderness. The altars, the table of showbread, the candlestick, the vail, the Ark of the Covenant, and the cherubim, all, with mute but mighty eloquence, told the story of redemption and the afterlife.

But even after four thousand years of such instruction, when much progress had been made, after all the work of prophets, priests and poets, after all the history of the Old Testament, this method of instruction was continued. And hence, on the night when he was betrayed, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink, ye, all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament, shed for many for the remission of sins. This is my body broken for you: this do in remembrance of me; and this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come" (Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:24-26).

The supper, then, is threefold in its purpose:

1. *It is commemorative.* “This do in remembrance of me.” We all shrink from the thought of being forgotten. This is why we carve our names on the trees and rocks, and give to others tokens to help hold our place in their hearts. It is this also that rears the lofty monument, and marks the simple slab by our graves. Jesus took upon himself our natures, and he, too, shrank from the doleful thought of being forgotten. And he would be remembered at his best. This was not in the rich symbolism of Judaism; it was not in the glowing pictures of prophecy; it was not in his lowly birth in the manger; it was not when, as the Prince of preachers, “he spake as never man spake;” it was not when he wrought his marvelous miracles: driving the fever away with a word, cleansing the leper with a touch, calming the wild winds and waves with his voice, and speaking the dead into life; it was not the transfiguration scene, when, for a moment, he was robed in all the glory of his former life with the Father; but it was *his death on the cross*, when the work of saving a lost world was *finished*. Whatever else we forget, we must not forget this. Others may magnify his life, and minify his death, but we cannot. With Paul, we must always say, “I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).
2. *It is symbolic.* “This is my body – this is my blood.” You point to a picture on the wall, and say, “This is my father.” Not your real father, but a picture of him. This is not a picture of the form and face of the Lord, but of his loving heart, as he freely gave his life for us.

And as the material body cannot live without food and drink, neither can the spiritual body without feeding upon the Christ. These symbols, then, are stepping-stones by which we climb up into a higher and holier realm and hold sweet communion with our God.

3. *It is prophetic.* “As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come.” Calvary is not the end. It is only the awful climax of the first part of the

drama of salvation. The curtain is to rise again, when the whole scene will be changed. Then there will be no mockery and nails and spears and thorns; there will be no bloody hands and feet and temples and side; there will be no broken heart and agonizing cry for help, and there will be no darkness and no death. But our glorious King, in all the majesty and might and glory of heaven, will come again without a sin-offering for salvation, to claim his own and lift them up into the clouds to be with him forever. On that day, after his resurrection, when he was taken up in a cloud and passed out of the sight of his sorrowing disciples, the angels said to them, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). And Paul, twenty years later, said, “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”

This was the one always-present element in the meetings of the apostolic church. Often they had no sermon, but the Supper was never absent. “Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7). This passage shows that the early Christians met on the Lord’s Day to break the loaf. This was their prime purpose. Paul’s preaching was incidental. When this ordinance was established nothing was said as to the frequency of its observance. And had nothing more been said, each congregation would have been left to its own judgment in the matter. But the apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, in this as in other matters left indefinite by the Savior’s personal instruction, have given us light, and that light becomes our law. Salvation was to be found only in the blood of Christ, and so the cross, like the brazen serpent, was always lifted up that all men might see it and be saved.

And here today the eldership should faithfully follow their example. There may be no sermon, or that which is worse, the sermon may be bad; then they must see that these sacred emblems

save the day. The sermon may be so “learned” as to amount to an unknown tongue to the hearer; then the loaf and the cup must speak in words which all can comprehend. The sermon may be so “profound” and lofty that the lambs of the flock are left without food; then the supper in its simplicity must feed them. The sermon may be so critical and cold that the pew is left shivering in doubt; then the cross, throbbing with life and love, must come to the rescue. The preacher may be in an ugly mood and he may quarrel at the people instead of preaching the Christ; then the sacred memorials of the loving Lord, like oil upon troubled waters, must soothe their souls and send them away in peace.

How shall the eldership get the best results from the Lord’s Supper service? This question is of great importance.

1. *Not by another sermon.* This might be characterized as the “besetting sin” of many elders. And usually, in proportion to their inability to speak to edification is their desire to deliver a long preachment. This of all times is the worst for such a sermon. Many of the people have already spent an hour in the Bible school, and more than an hour in the following service, and hence are wearied in both body and mind, and incapable of appreciating even an interesting and valuable discourse.
2. *Not by faultfinding.* There are times and places when our faults should be pointed out and condemned, but not here. It is as much a duty to condemn the wrong as it is to commend the right, but a death scene is not the place for that condemnation. In the case of literal death, what could be more inappropriate than such a lecture? At this time, if the heart be not filled with love and tenderness, let the lips be silent.
3. *But by making it a fitting climax of the morning service.* This is not always done, nor is it easily done, but it can be done. By the careful observance of the following rules it can be accomplished:

- (1) *Come to the table in a worshipful spirit.* Come from the closet of private prayer to the church; speak to God before you speak to men; confess all your sins and have them forgiven before you touch these sacred symbols. If for any cause you cannot do this, it would be well to change places with some brother elder for the day.
- (2) *Let your words be few and well chosen.* As a rule the people understand the purpose of the institution, and so do not need much instruction. What is more impressive in the death of some dear one than to lift the white sheet and let the living look on their dead? In this case silence is more than speech, and the sad vision more than all eloquence. As Mark Antony, by the side of dead Caesar, said, "I tell you that which you yourselves do know: Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor, poor dumb mouths, and bid them speak for me."
- (3) *Appeal to the heart rather than to the head.* A missionary was sent to examine some converts who, since their conversion, had learned to read. She asked one, a plain village woman, to tell a Bible story. She chose the story of the crucifixion. And as she told it, it had a pathos and power and beauty never before seen or felt by the missionary. And when she came to where they drove the nails through his hands, she wept aloud, and threw her arms about the neck of her teacher, and said, "I cannot go any further – it will break my heart!"
- (4) *Sound the note of hope.* Of course we will sorrow as we look upon bloody Calvary, and hear the cries of the suffering Savior, but we sorrow not "as others who have no hope." Some men are greater in death than in life. The living Christ was mighty, but the dying Christ was mightier. The Captain of our salvation had to be made perfect through suffering; the cornerstone of the temple of hope had to be tried in the fire before it was fit for the building. Christ could save others, but he could not save

himself. He must die in order that he might live, and reign and rule as the Lord of lords and the King of kings, and bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel. His blood, like the blood of his martyrs, is the seed of the church and the hope of the world.

- (5) *Connect the sermon and the Supper.* In a good sermon this can be easily done. Indeed, the sermon will shape the talk at the table. In a sermon which could not be called “good,” the elder who is a good hearer, and who possesses only average ingenuity, can find some thought with which the two can be united. But whatever the sermon, by all means, if possible, let there be no deep chasm between that and the Supper; let it be one continuous service, with the latter as the dome to the temple, as the finale to the symphony.

This writer remembers with gratitude an elder who could do to perfection the thing we advocate. He was a judge on the bench, a cultured gentleman of fine spirit, and a devout Christian. I was preaching for a little congregation in a small river town in Missouri, and my sermons were crude, as was plainly evident to most of the people. But the good judge usually presided at the table, and his talks, always brief and helpful, so connected them with the Supper that the joint service was one harmonious whole. I have grown older since that day and have preached to large churches at important places and have been associated with many elders, but never have I seen one like the judge. And a thousand times since, when some man was undoing all the good of my discourse with his harangue at the table, have I longed and prayed for the multiplication of the progeny of this ideal elder.

Let no one infer from this that I do not appreciate the eldership, for this is far from the truth. But there are elders *and* elders, just as it is with the preachers. Webster was not far wrong when, after being bored by an ignorant preacher, he said that one of the unanswerable arguments in favor of Christianity was that it had succeeded *in spite of its pulpit*. The faithful elder has had much to do with the growth of Christianity. This is seen in the history of the Restoration



movement. Groups of scattered brethren have generally been first called together to “break the loaf.” These brethren, led by some modest and faithful elder, have been true to the Lord, and he has blessed them. He could not conduct a preaching service, but he could, and did, preside at the table, and encouraged his brethren until the few became many, and the weak became strong, and a house was built and a great church was established. This was true in a multitude of cases. And finally, when we see things as they are seen in heaven, we will discover that the unknown elder who did such work was a more important factor in the growth of Christianity than we ever dreamed of. And who can estimate the value of the thousands of such men, in the large churches as well as the small ones, and at the heart of the brotherhood as well as on the frontier, who are giving the Lord their lives in the most unstinted and unselfish way?