

# Special Studies

by

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From his book *SCRIPTURAL ELDERS AND DEACONS*

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## NO ELDER THEORIES

### PROOFS OFFERED FOR THE "NO ELDER" THEORY

A—*There Is No Such OFFICE In The Church As ELDERS.* It is argued that there is no such thing in the church as an "office." That the expression "office of a bishop" in I Timothy 3:1 is from "episcopee" which means twice "visitation" and twice "oversight," but not at any time as "official" authority. It is further argued that this is a WORK and not an authority: "If any man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good WORK."

It is further contended that the word "office" in respect to a deacon in I Timothy 3:10, 13, is from the Greek "diakoneo" and is found 36 times in the New Testament, 24 times translated "to minister," and 10 times "to serve." Only twice is the word translated "office" and that is in this chapter. The reason given for this translation here is that the translators of the King James Version were mostly from the Episcopal Church, and the idea of "office" was prominent in their minds.

The word "office" in I Timothy 3:1 is from "Episcopee" and is defined in *Abbott-Smith's Greek-Lexicon* as: "Office, charge, esp. office of an episcopos." *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* gives a similar meaning.

But some contend that we cannot take these lexicographers for they do not always give the true meaning. Webster gives the meaning of "baptism" as: "Sprinkling, pouring or immersion," therefore, if we take one we must take the other.

This is not true because it is the work of a lexicographer to define words in their current usage—as they are understood at the time of their use. Thayer defines words, not as what they now mean, but what they meant when spoken. Webster defines words as they are understood generally today, and that is what he did in the case of "baptism."

But it is admitted in the above that twice the word in I Timothy 3:1 means "oversight"; and that twice in I Timothy 3:10, 13

the word means "work." Is it to be understood that anything that is a work is not of authority? Christ was and is in authority—supreme authority in the church—but he also had work to do. All men in authority, whatever degree it may be, must work in executing that authority. It is true that the "office of a bishop" is a "good work." But it is also admitted in the above argument that the word means "oversight." What is oversight? It means to oversee, to look over, to superintend. Does one appointed to look over the affairs of another have any authority at all? Authority always carries the idea of responsibility, and responsibility carries the idea of authority. If one Christian is in any way responsible for another Christian, to that extent he has authority and must exercise it in order to fulfill his responsibility.

The word "office" in I Timothy 3:10, 13 means to serve. But since this is a special sense of service, and office is the word to designate that service, the office of a deacon is simply the work of a deacon. But the fact that it is a work does not imply that there is no office. All Christians have an "office" to perform, which means a "work." In Romans 12:4, 5: "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." All members of the body of Christ have an "office"—WORK to perform. All these officers are not the same—some have authority over others—but each has authority to do the work assigned him.

It is contended from I Peter 5:2: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind,"—that the older members are to take the oversight, not in an official capacity but just to do the work.

In the first place, if the older members were to take the "oversight" or superintendency of the other members, it implies that much authority. You just can't get around the idea of authority in the oversight. In the second place, Peter is not talking about the older members, but those who are the elders—Peter himself was such an elder—to take the oversight. It is a perversion of the passage to say "older members." This would include women as well as men, which would put them in the "oversight."

It is also argued that in Hebrews 13:17: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves,"—does not imply an office, and then they refer to the marginal note of the Revised Version which says: "Obey them that are your guides or leaders." But if one is a guide or leader, is he not performing an assigned work? If so, the work is the "office" and the one who does the work is an "officer." And since he is to rule or guide, he has authority to do that. He is an officer in the office that rules.

B.—*There Is No Authority Of One Man Over Another In The Church.* It is argued that one member of the church does not exercise any authority over another member, else some would be submitting to man rather than to Christ.

This cannot be true for wives are taught to submit to their husbands in everything (Eph. 5:23, 24). If both are Christians, we have one Christian submitting to another by the authority of Christ. Again, in Ephesians 6:1 children are to obey their parents in the Lord. If both child and parents are Christians, we have one Christian submitting—obeying—to others. These passages destroy the above argument of no man over another in the church.

If we submit to men called "elders," we will have to do away with the authority of Christ, it is said. But to reject the authority of the eldership as Christ has appointed would do away with the authority of Christ. Any man to whom Christ has delegated authority must be recognized as such or we reject the authority of Christ.

But some say, "Christ said no one would exercise authority over another—Matthew 20:25, 26. There will be none in the church to exercise authority over any other."

Let us examine this passage and the conclusion drawn in this argument. When James and John with their mother came to Jesus they came "worshipping him." They did not regard him as a mere man or as a servant on this occasion, even though Jesus is pictured in some places as a servant. They regarded him as a King; not only that, but as **THE KING**. To say that a King is not an official is to totally ignore the meaning of the word. Then the request made by this mother for her two sons was that they might "sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy kingdom." It is clearly evident that she was speaking of their authority **IN HIS KINGDOM**. The right hand and left hand indicates supreme authority next to Jesus. When Christ sat at the right hand of God, it meant that he was given authority next to God. These recognized the authority of Christ, thus his official capacity as King. The parallel passage is found in Mark 10:35-45, and in verse 40: "But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared." The mother is simply asking Jesus to disregard the other apostles and place her sons above them in authority.

Jesus answered: "Ye know not what ye ask." They did not understand the nature of his kingdom. Certainly they knew what they were asking for, but they did not understand that the kingdom of Christ was to be a spiritual kingdom without earthly authority. They did not understand that the greatness in his kingdom depended upon service rather than ruling authority. He asked them if they were able to endure

his suffering—"drink this cup," and they answered ignorantly that they were. Mark adds, "to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with," meaning his suffering.

Now when the other ten heard that James and John had made this request they were angry. Their anger did not stem from the fact that James and John had asked for a favor, but that they had asked for authority over them. It was a known fact that the apostles of Christ were continually arguing about who was to be the greater, which they conceived to be the one in authority over the rest. Jesus then proceeded to show them that his kingdom was not like that of the Gentiles, which denoted all other than the Jews. Greatness in his kingdom did not depend upon official rank, but upon service, and Jesus cites himself as an example of service. He did not imply that he was not a king, an official in the kingdom.

In verse 17 he was talking to the twelve and not to all men. What he said to them included them only. The passage does not teach that there are no authorities in the kingdom of Christ. That is to completely miss the point of Christ's statement. He did not teach, by referring to the kingdoms of the Gentiles, that there would be no authority of officials in his kingdom; he said: "and they that are GREAT exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister" (verses 26, 27). "And it shall not be so among you" refers to "greatness" rather than authority. The great of the Gentiles were those in authority, while the great in the kingdom of Christ were the ministers.

Since he was talking to and about the twelve apostles, he did not intend that they should exercise authority over each other. He said, "It shall not be so AMONG YOU." It is true that the apostles themselves were officials in the kingdom as "witnesses," "judges," and "rulers." But the apostles had no authority, one over the other, but all had equal authority under Christ.

*C—There is no need for elders to rule over the church as we have the Bible today.* It is contended that all Christians have the Bible today as a perfect guide and do not have need for men called "elders" to rule over them. If all obey the Bible, they obey Christ. If elders must follow the Bible in their rule, why cannot all follow the Bible? If this is true, they say, we have no need for elders today.

One cannot possibly follow the Bible without obeying the commands of Christ, one of which is to submit to the elders in each congregation. Christ has commanded it. Hebrews 13:17: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." And I Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor."

But if elders are not needed because we have the Bible today, neither do we need preachers and teachers today. Just let each one follow the Bible. But we know that to follow the Bible we must have preachers and teachers of truth because the Bible requires it. It is absurd to say we do not need a thing because we have the Bible when the Bible itself demands that thing. One is not following the Bible when he denies that the church today needs elders to oversee the local work.

D—*We cannot have elders today because we have no inspired men: spiritually gifted men.* It seems that because some were inspired or had spiritual gifts to some measure, that elders today must have the same gifts, else we cannot have elders in the church. We do not deny that some elders in New Testament days were spiritually gifted men, but it is equally certain that there were some who were not.

It is argued that Acts 8:14-18 is an example of Peter and John going to Samaria after the church had been established there to give spiritual gifts, including inspiration, to make elders. When this inspiration ceased the elders ceased.

This is not the case, as will be seen by carefully reading this entire chapter. Elders are not one time mentioned as being made in Samaria, especially at this time. How could one imagine that Peter and John made elders by giving them the power of inspiration, when neither "elder" nor "inspiration" is mentioned in the chapter? The spiritual abilities given at Samaria were to enable the church to continue in its growth and edification, because the New Testament had not then been completed and they had no guide as we have today. The New Testament now does exactly what those spiritual abilities did then.

It is also argued that we know all elders were inspired because God ordered the early church to hear and obey them and submit to them. The Holy Spirit would not have told those people to obey the elders and then leave them exposed to error. Hence, elders were inspired, and when inspiration ceased, the elders as such ceased.

In the first place, where did God ever say: "hear and obey inspired men"? He said to hear Christ (Matt. 17:5; Acts 3:22). Christ is the only one to be heard in religious matters, but he speaks to us through his apostles and prophets.

In the second place, inspiration did not do one thing more for the men in the early church than the written word of God will do now. The difference in the spiritual gift of inspiration to preach and teach then and now is in the method of receiving the message rather than in delivering the message. Preachers are the same, the message is the same, but the method of receiving it is different. Then it came by direct inspiration, but now it comes through the written word of God. Elders are the same today as then. The spiritual gifts gave them the ability to

do the work assigned them just as the word of God gives them the knowledge now.

In the third place, some elders received instructions from Paul. Why would Paul teach them their duties and tell them their responsibilities if they were inspired to know those things? In Acts 20:27, 28 Paul said, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Paul had declared to them the counsel of God and then told them their duty. Why this if they were all inspired?

In the fourth place, inspiration provided that the one who possessed it could not err in teaching, but then some elders did err in teaching, for Paul said, "For I know this, that after my departing shall greivous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves (elders) shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30). This proves that all elders did not have the spiritual gift of inspiration. But if some were inspired, it does not prove that elders were done away when inspiration ceased any more than it proves that preachers were done away with inspiration, for some preachers had the gift of inspiration.

In the fifth place, Hebrews 13:7 says that some have the rule. From I Timothy 5:17 we learn that the elders are to rule. Those who had the rule were not all inspired so far as the record shows. The general date of the Hebrew letter is about 63 A.D. In chapter 5:12, we learn that some had been in the church long enough to be teachers. Does that mean that they had been in the church long enough to be inspired? Some were teachers by living in the church long enough to learn the truth so as to teach it. In Titus 1:9, speaking of the elders, Paul says "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught." Does this sound like inspiration?

In the sixth place, Paul did not mention inspiration as a qualification for the eldership in I Timothy 3 or Titus 1. If it had been essential it would have been mentioned along with the other qualifications.

It is argued that I Cor. 12:1-13 and Eph. 4:11-13 show that spiritual gifts included elders or pastors and that they were done away with the spiritual gifts when the perfect way was revealed (I Cor. 13:8-10). It is further argued that I Cor. 12:28 proves that the elders were done away by the term "governments," which passed away with other spiritual gifts. The following syllogism is given to prove it:

1. Elders, by implication, are included with the spiritually gifted men of I Cor. 12 and Eph. 4.
2. The spiritually gifted men ceased with the close of spiritual gifts.

3. Therefore, there are no elders or church officers today.

First, I Cor. 12:1-13 and Eph. 4:11-13 do not show that spiritual gifts included elders or pastors. Gifts were not the men as such in Ephesians 4:11, for verse 8 says, "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." These men as spiritually endowed workers were given to the church. Many things are gifts, but the word itself does not tell what is given. Christ is a "gift" (John 3:16), but it does not mean a spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit. These men were "gifts" but they had "spiritual gifts," or abilities. Men as men were not given to the church as "gifts" but men with spiritual gifts (elders included) were given.

Second, the passage tells how long the "spiritually gifted" men were to be in the church: "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Now that we have the unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God which is revealed in the New Testament, we do not need spiritual gifts in men. But the spiritual gifts have ceased, not the men. The unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God supply these men now with the same that spiritual gifts supplied then.

Third, if elders are done away with spiritual gifts in these passages, evangelists and teachers are also done away. Even some Christians had spiritual gifts, such as the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9), but Christians did not cease when the spiritually gifted Christians ceased. The spiritual gifts just gave away to the complete word of God when it was revealed. But if it be admitted that preachers, teachers and Christians remain today, though not spiritually gifted, it must be admitted by the same rule that elders remain today in the same way.

The syllogism in the argument is not true because the conclusion is not in agreement with the premises. It should be:

1. Elders, by implication, are included with the spiritually gifted men of I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.
2. The spiritually gifted men ceased with the close of spiritual gifts.
3. Therefore, there are no spiritually gifted elders or church officers today. But it does not follow that there are no elders of any kind today.

E—*We cannot have elders today because no one can qualify.* It is argued that the qualifications listed for a bishop are too perfect for man to reach, and, therefore, we cannot have elders today.

If this reasoning be true, it follows that no man could have ever been an elder, even in the early church, because no man is perfect. But we know the early church did have elders. We further know that these elders were not perfect, for those in Ephesus to whom Paul talked in

Acts 20 needed building up (Acts 20:32), and Paul prophesied that some of them would lead disciples away after them (Acts 20:30).

The standard for a Christian is perfect. If we follow the same reasoning as above, we must conclude that no one can be a Christian today because no one can be perfect. Every standard of God is perfect. An elder must measure relatively high in every qualification given in the word of God, but he must continue to grow.

F—*We have no elders today because we do not know how to appoint them.* It is argued that since the Bible does not specify HOW to appoint the elders, we cannot have them in the church today.

But the Bible does not tell us HOW to serve the Lord's Supper, or how many songs to sing in worship, or the order in which we should worship on the Lord's Day. Are we to conclude that we are not to have the Lord's Supper, sing songs of praise to God or worship on the Lord's Day just because God did not tell us just the procedure of doing these things? These are left to human judgment in full harmony with all Bible principles governing such matters. The same is true of appointing elders.

G—*We can have no elders today because we have no one to appoint them.* Three reasons are given why we do not have men who can appoint elders today, and, consequently, can have no elders.

1. In the New Testament times inspired men did the appointing and now we do not have inspired men, and therefore, can have no appointing.

2. There are three qualifications of elders that no man can know unless he is guided by the Holy Spirit: (1) Blameless (2) Holy (3) Just. One must be able to read the heart to know this, and only the Holy Spirit could guide men to select elders. Timothy and Titus received this power of inspiration from Paul and could appoint elders; today we cannot.

3. No one can lay hands on men today and give them the spiritual gifts they need to be elders.

Let us now examine each of these in order.

1. There is no indication anywhere in the Bible that inspired men were to do the appointing. Just because Timothy and Titus did the appointing of some of the elders, and Paul and Barnabas also did some appointing, it does not follow that only inspired men must do the appointing. These men preached also, but it does not follow that only inspired men can preach. It can not be proved that either Timothy or Titus was inspired. Paul told Timothy to teach what he had learned from him (2 Tim. 2:2); and from the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:14, 15); and Paul told him to study to be approved (2 Tim. 2:15); and to read



(I Tim. 4:13). They may have had some spiritual gifts, but it had no bearing on the appointment of elders.

2. Blameless, holy and just are qualities that can be known in every man. Jesus said a good tree brings forth good fruit, and by that we may know the tree: "By their fruit ye shall know them" Matt. 7:20). How does one tell the difference between a child of God and a child of the devil? Paul knew Peter was wrong by his actions (Gal. 2:11).

But these are not the only qualities of man that come in the same class. Any condition of the heart cannot be known by another except by his actions or words. What about faith and repentance? How can a preacher know one has really believed and repented of his sins before he baptizes him? Must the preacher be inspired by the Holy Spirit to know this? No. He determines the condition of the heart by his words and actions. Just so one can tell when a man is blameless, holy and just.

3. It has already been shown that elders do not need spiritual gifts today to do their work. They can use the word of God now. But the Bible teaches that some besides the apostles "laid hands" on men to appoint them elders, and none but the apostles could transmit the spiritual gifts (Acts 8:18). Timothy and Titus were not apostles and could not give any measure of spiritual gifts by the "laying on of their hands."

But besides all this, the "laying on of hands" did not always signify the giving of spiritual gifts. This act was for a number of things. The expression in the Bible may refer to unpleasant things also. Notice:

(1) Acts 4:3—The Sadducees "laid hands on" the apostles to put them in prison.

(2) Acts 5:18—Again the Sadducees "laid hands on" the apostles and put them in prison.

(3) Acts 6:6—Apostles "laid hands" on those selected by the multitude and appointed them to the work. Stephen was "full of the Holy Ghost." The multitude selected and the apostles "appointed," verse 3.

(4) Acts 8:17, 18—The apostles, Peter and John, "laid their hands" on some in Samaria to "give the Holy Ghost"—spiritual gifts.

(5) Acts 13:3—The church at Antioch "appointed" two whom the Holy Spirit had selected, to do a certain work. No spiritual gifts are indicated.

(6) Acts 28:8—Paul "laid his hands" on the father of Publius to heal him. No spiritual gift given, but a means of miraculous healing.

(7) I Tim. 4:14—The presbytery "laid hands on Timothy" with respect to some gift of prophecy regarding his work.

(8) 2 Tim. 1:6—Paul "laid hands" on Timothy to convey a gift of God—probably some spiritual gift.

(9) I Tim. 5:22—Paul told Timothy not to "lay hands" suddenly on any man. This refers to appointing.

We glean from these few passages that the "laying on of hands" sometimes meant "to arrest or take hold of"; sometimes "to appoint or designate"; sometimes "to transmit a spiritual gift of one kind or another"; and sometimes "as a means of miraculous healing." Spiritual gifts are not essential today to elders in performing their duties, as the word of God is sufficient, hence we have no need for men who "give spiritual gifts by laying on of hands."

H—*We do not have elders today because there is some work that no elder can do today.* It is argued that since there is some work that no man can do today, that was done by the elders of the early church, there can be no elders today. Following is a list of some of those things they say no man can do today.

(1) James 5:14, 15 teaches us to call for the elders of the church when one is sick, and they will come and anoint with oil in the name of the Lord and pray for the sick and he will be healed. This was miraculous healing and cannot be done by so called elders today.

Let us notice this passage. The healing of James 5:14 was really by the power of God. The oil poured on by the elders does not necessarily mean a miracle. Oil was used for several things in the Bible:

- a. Appointing one to a charge (I Sam. 16:12, 13).
- b. For medicine (Luke 10:34).
- c. For food (Ex. 29:2).
- d. For a cosmetic (Ps. 104:15).
- e. For a light (Ex. 27:20).

Not one time is oil used to perform a miracle. Miracles were used to confirm the word, but when the word was fully confirmed and completely revealed the miracles ceased, but the preaching of that word did not cease. Since this passage says the oil was poured on sick people, it is more reasonable to believe that it was used for medicine. The elders are called to administer whatever aid they can to the sick, while at the same time praying for them. The writer here says the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," and then uses Elias praying for the rain as an example (verse 17, 18). We read that the reference of Elias was not a miracle but by natural process: a cloud coming from over the ocean (I Kings 18:44, 45). So neither the oil nor the prayer would suggest that they were to perform a miracle. But if those elders did perform a miracle, would it follow that all elders are to perform miracles? Some preachers performed miracles at that time, but preachers are not to pass away because no preacher can perform miracles today.

(2) It is argued that no elder today can "lay hands on" another to give him spiritual gifts, and that was one work of elders in New Testament times. The presbytery (eldership) gave such a gift to Timothy (I Tim. 4:14).

It has already been shown that "laying on of hands" did not always mean the conveying of spiritual gifts. In fact it never referred to that except in the case of an apostle, and then it may mean something else as determined by the context. The "laying on of hands" in I Tim. 4:14 means the same as in Acts 13:3—appointing to some work. No elder as such ever laid his hands on any man to transmit to him a spiritual gift.

(3) It is argued that an elder can not feed the flock of God. No man is qualified today to feed anyone that the word of God does not better feed. The church can feed itself by studying the word. What can an elder feed that any other member of the church can not feed?

To feed the flock is to put the word before them and see that they learn it. Things that elders can do that others can not do in this realm is a matter of authority. Many can do certain things but do not have the authority or right to do it. The Bible calls those who are Christians "children" (I John 2:1; Eph. 5:8; Rom. 8:17; Eph. 5:1). Elders are the older, stronger children who have been commissioned by the Saviour to feed the others the word of God. One might make arrests for violation of a law IF he had the authority of the higher powers. Christ, who is head of the church, gave authority for the local church to the eldership. They can exercise that authority when others in the church can not, because of the authority given them by Christ through his word.

(4) It is also argued that one thing an elder can not do today is to rule and take oversight. Only the apostles and inspired men could do that, and as we have no apostles or inspired men alive today we have no one to rule and take oversight.

Again this is a matter of authority. If the Bible teaches that the congregation is to submit to those who are in the oversight, can one be submissive to Christ and not be submissive to the elders? Can a wife obey Christ without obeying his authority to submit to her husband? We have the writings of the apostles and inspired men today as a guide, but someone must see that it is obeyed and followed exactly as it should be. Who is to do this? Even the church in Jerusalem, where the apostles were, had elders, If they needed elders there, do we not need them today with the writings of the apostles?

As to the matter of authority, I can not walk out on the street and arrest a man for a traffic violation, but a policeman can because he has the authority to do it. If I were to become a policeman I would have the authority to do some things in that line that I can not now do. Others may be physically able to do some things—even all things—an elder can do, but he does not have the authority from Christ to do them. That is the difference. It is not to be understood that in all points I am making the elders policemen in the church. I am simply comparing the right to do things by authority over others.

I—*The Holy Spirit made elders in Ephesus, and since the Holy Spirit does not make elders now, we do not have elders today.* The Holy Spirit did make elders then, and He makes them now. The Holy Spirit makes elders just as He makes Christians. He gives the standard of qualifications, and when one complies with them he becomes a Christian. The same is true of the elders. When one complies with all the requirements to become an elder that have been given by the Holy Spirit, he is an elder made by the Holy Spirit. That is the very reason the list of qualifications is recorded in I Timothy and Titus.

J—*Some Churches did not have elders, so we all need not have them today.* This is based upon the assumption that at least the Bible does not teach that all churches had elders. For instance, the church at Corinth, the elders are not mentioned. But after the days of the apostles, Clement of Rome wrote an epistle to the Corinthians and at the close he mentions the elders. Paul appointed elders in every city where he preached (Acts 14:23), and it follows that he practiced the same thing at Corinth.

There is not a single argument made against the appointment of qualified elders in every church that will stand the test of God's word. "Beloved, believe not every spirit . . ." (I John 4:1).

## THE RELATIONSHIP—APOSTLES, ELDERS, PREACHERS

### I. THE RELATIONSHIP

A relationship exists between the apostles and elders, and between elders and preachers. This relationship must be respected, yet not transgressed. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:4, 5).

Since all these members are in the one body, the church of our Lord, and all the members have not the same work to do, but all are under the same Head—Christ, there must be a close relationship between all three classes considered here as public workers in the church: the apostles, elders and preachers. This does not necessarily mean that their work overlaps; but there is a connection and relationship in their work that makes for the unity of the Faith.

It must be understood in the study of this relationship that the terms: *Apostle*, *Elder*, and *Preacher* do not mean the same thing and do not refer to the same work. They are very distinct, one from the other. However, the same man may be an apostle, elder and preacher all at the same time. Peter is an example. He was an apostle (Matt. 10:2); an elder (I Peter 1:1; 5-2); and a preacher (Acts 2—the first gospel sermon). This does not mean that because Peter did or said a certain thing that any preacher may do the same thing, for Peter may have been acting or speaking as an apostle or an elder rather than as a preacher. It must be determined in what capacity he was speaking or acting to know whether it applies to certain men today. There is quite a difference in the scope of authority and the nature of the work of these three classes of men in the church.

### II. APOSTLES AND ELDERS

When Christ delegated authority to a certain one, that one may exercise that authority, but another cannot assume it without violating God's plan. The apostles were granted an authority in the church that no other can take. (Matt. 16:19; 18:18).

#### *A. The difference in authority of apostles and elders.*

The authority of the apostles was universal in scope. Their rule and authority extended over all congregations equally. Their writings today are the authority of Christ in all churches of Christ. Paul said that he had the care of all the churches. (2 Cor. 11:28). When he exercised such authority it was only as an apostle and never as an elder or a preacher.

The authority of the elders is local in scope, never extending beyond the bounds that define a local church. There is never an exception to this rule in the New Testament. The elders have no rule over any person beyond the scope of their local authority in the church where they serve. When Peter acted in authority over different congregations, he did so as an apostle and not as an elder.

*B. The difference in the qualifications of apostles and elders.*

The work of the apostles was REVEALING AND CREATIVE as well as SUPERVISORY. The very nature of their work in revealing and creating suggested that there could be no successor to the apostles. The church has been established and the full will of God has been revealed, so there is no need for a further work of apostles. While, on the other hand, the elder's work is only SUPERVISORY and by nature requires succession to the office as long as the church exists.

The qualifications for the work of an apostle make it impossible to have apostles in the church today in the sense that we have elders. Notice some of the qualifications for this work:

1. An apostle must have been with Christ from the beginning of his ministry. (John 15:26, 27). Paul was the exception to this, but spoke of himself as "one born out of due time" (I Cor. 15-8). Today no one lives who has been with Christ from the beginning of his ministry, nor has one witnessed his resurrection as "one born out of due time." Hence, no one can qualify to be an apostle today.

2. An apostle must have been a witness of the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 26:32; 28:7; Acts 1:8; 2:32). No one can be an eye witness to the resurrection of Christ today, therefore, there can be no living qualified apostles today in the church.

3. An apostle must have been chosen personally by Christ for this work (Acts 1:2; Matt. 10:1-5). Christ does not personally select such men today, so there are no living apostles in the church now. This was so even in the case of Matthias (Acts 1:24).

The qualifications for elders are found in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Any good, experienced Christian father and husband can develop these qualifications today. There is not a single one that any good Christian man should not have, with the exception of experience, age and family relations.

*C. The specific duties of an apostle are different from the duties of elders.*

The work of the apostles was:

1. To be ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). They were his

personal representatives here on earth after he ascended to the Father. The elders are not personal representatives of Christ today any more than any other Christian. The work of an ambassador is to speak for and represent a king or ruler in a foreign country. This is exactly the work the apostles did, but neither the elders, nor anyone else, has such duties today. Neither did the elders in New Testament times have such work to do.

2. The apostles were to reveal the will of Christ to all men. This has been done and completed. (Jude 3, 17; Gal. 1:8, 9). They were guided without error by the Holy Spirit to speak the full truth of Christ on all matters. (John 14:26; 16:13; Luke 24:49; Acts 2:1-4). The will of Christ is now complete and needs no addition. (2 Pet. 1-3; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Therefore, the active work of the apostles is no more. However, their writings are the sole authority in all matters of faith in the church today. The elders are not empowered to reveal the will of Christ in addition to what has been revealed by the apostles. The work of the elders is to see that the revealed will of Christ is kept by the "flock which is among" them.

3. The apostles are to be judges of God's people. (Matt. 19:28). There is a sense in which the apostles will "judge" while Christ is on the throne of his glory. This "judging" is the "binding" and "loosing" of Matt. 16:19. Notice when this judging is to be: "In the regeneration"—when men are regenerated or born again. That certainly means now. Also it is to be when Christ sits on the throne of his glory. He is now sitting on that throne. (Acts 2:30, 31). The *Israel* refers to the people of God today in the church. We have no fleshly Israel now so far as Christianity is concerned (Gal. 3:28, 29), but all Christians are spiritual Israel (Rom. 2:28; 9:6; Gal. 6:15). The word *twelve* signifies all because the whole of fleshly Israel consisted of twelve tribes. The apostles are "judging" through their writings today while Christ rules with all authority upon his throne.

But the elders have no such authority. They have no authority to "bind" or "loose" in matters of faith. That has already been completed in the work of the apostles.

#### D. *The relationship between apostles and elders.*

It has been shown that their work and scope of authority are in separate fields, but there is a close connection between their duties and the fields of their work. In the New Testament times when matters of importance to the church arose, both the apostles and elders assembled and considered the matter. (Acts 15:1-6—the matter of circumcision and the law of Moses). This matter was settled by the Holy Spirit and not by the authority of the elders. But the elders as well as the apostles saw that the matter was kept in accord with revelation. Both are under

the authority of Christ; and both are working for the salvation of the world and the glory of God.

### III. ELDERS AND PREACHERS

As in the case of apostles and elders and their relationship, there is a relationship between elders and preachers that must be observed strictly if both are to do their work properly and scripturally. The work of elders and preachers is different; although one might be both an elder and a preacher at the same time. He can do things as a preacher that he cannot do as an elder, or do things as an elder that he cannot do as a preacher. For instance, he may preach for several congregations but he cannot exercise the authority of an overseer in any congregation. Or he may exercise the oversight as an elder in a certain congregation but he can not exercise the oversight of several congregations at the same time.

#### A. *Preachers sometimes try to dominate elders.*

Preachers often ignore the eldership. Young preachers sometimes try to do their work without elders, thinking that they can better carry out their ideas and plans without the restraint of the eldership to check them. Many think they know more than the elders, and the sad part is that they sometimes do, but this does not authorize preachers to usurp control of the oversight. No doubt one of the reasons for inefficient elders today is the zeal of young, ambitious preachers who have not learned the standard of God's organization for the church.

In the *Apostolic Times* of May, 1951, on page 123, brother Rue Porter made this observation: "Among the problems confronting the church today, none seems to be more constantly coming up than certain questions relating to the eldership. That is, no doubt, due to the fact that new congregations are constantly gathered together and we have a great number of young and enthusiastic preachers who seem not to have realized as yet that the eldership as pictured in the New Testament is the picture of a perfect standard toward which every man chosen for that work should aim and strive. . . .

"Most of the men who have been made elders get little encouragement for the efforts they make. They are looked upon by some preachers and many members as a sort of *necessary useless* sort of men. Some of us will accept the advice of a man who was never chosen by any one to oversee, rather than follow the counsel of a properly selected and appointed eldership."

To this I say, Amen. One might as well ignore some expression of worship that God has ordained in the church as to ignore this arrangement in the organization of the church.



B. *Many preachers act as sole judges of who is and who is not qualified to be elders in a certain place, disregarding the Bible qualifications.*

We can all go to the Bible and determine who is and who is not a qualified elder. But when preachers say, "That is not necessary to be an elder," when speaking of some qualification, "I'll just appoint him anyway," that is going too far. Sometimes a preacher refuses to appoint, or allow to be appointed (as if he were the only judge), a qualified man to the eldership by giving some point of qualification that the Bible does not give. For instance, to demand that "apt to teach" means that the elder must be a seasoned, polished, public teacher or preacher. That is giving a meaning to this qualification that the Bible does not give.

Again in the *Apostolic Times*, May, 1951, page 123, brother Rue Porter says: "One congregation chose and appointed a man with others to serve them as elder, and a young preacher came along and decided that the congregation—most of whose members had been Christians and students longer than he, just didn't know enough to select men for the eldership, and so proceeded to attempt the 'unseating' of the elder to whom he objected! Of course the eldership and congregation were pretty prompt in teaching him a lesson he needed very much to learn. . . ."

"It seems easy for inexperienced preachers to decide that they *know* just exactly what elders must be in order to be elders, but for some unknown reason seem unable to catch a glimpse of what a perfect preacher should be!"

C. *Preachers claiming the position and authority of elders when they begin regular work at a place.*

A few preachers are so careless in the Scriptures as to claim to be an "Automatic Elder" when they move to a certain place to begin regular work there. They argue this way: The elders labor in word and doctrine (I Tim. 5:17); the preacher also labors in word and doctrine, and since the preacher always labors in this field, and it is the work of elders, it follows that the preacher is automatically an elder where ever he labors. That is the real argument. Just such reasoning! One might as well argue as follows: The elders are to "teach" (Titus 1:9), but women also are required to "teach" (Titus 2:4), therefore, women are automatically elders. Would not this argument be as strong as the one above?

There are some things wrong with this system. (1) This would completely disregard the qualifications for an elder as given by the Bible. Just any boy-preacher would be an elder where ever he preaches. The qualifications for an elder might as well be scratched from the Bible. (2) In a congregation where elders have never been appointed this young preacher would be THE ELDER—a one man rule. (3) This

would put a fence around the preacher that would block any move regarding his discharge from the pulpit, and also many of his other obligations. He would be in position to "block" any move by "the other elders" to do anything opposed by him. This would actually reduce itself to a one-man-rule.

Some preachers have actually contended that since it is the duty of the elders to feed the flock (Acts 20:28), and since some preachers do more feeding than the elders, the preacher **MUST** be one of the elders to have a scriptural arrangement. But it is also the business of preachers to feed (I Cor. 3:2). Just because some of the responsibilities of elders and preachers are very much the same, if not the same, is no reason to conclude that the one is equal to the other in all things. It was a responsibility of an apostle to teach, and it is also the responsibility of any Christian to teach the truth. Are we to conclude that every Christian is an apostle?

*D. Preachers exercising oversight in the place of the eldership.*

Some preachers follow the practice of denominationalism to make themselves **THE PASTOR** of the congregation where they preach. Why do some evangelists take this oversight? We give here three reasons for this practice.

1. In some places the elders are irresponsible and do not perform their work. This necessarily leaves the duties upon the shoulders of someone else, usually the preacher. He begins little by little to assume their work until finally he is acting as the eldership, even though he did not seek it in the beginning, then he tries to justify his practice in some way.

2. In some places there are no men qualified to become elders and either the membership places all responsibility and authority upon the preacher, or the preacher thinks he must assume the oversight in order for the work to go forward.

3. In some places the elders insist that the preacher take the leading part and make most of the decisions for them. It often forces the preacher into a position that he is not really seeking. But in all cases the evangelist of a congregation has no scriptural authority to take the oversight under any condition.

*E. Preachers exercising oversight over the elders.*

This is the most extreme claim toward popery we have found to date in the church of Christ. It is contended that preachers are not only **EQUAL** to the elders in the oversight, but are **ABOVE** them! Imagine a gospel preacher claiming **OVERSIGHT** over the elders of the church! But that is not the end. Imagine a gospel preacher claiming **OVERSIGHT** over not just one group of elders, but over **SEVERAL** elderships at the same time! This makes the preacher a sort of **ARCHBISHOP**.

In an article entitled *Over and Under The Eldership*, by I. C. Nance in the *Gospel Broadcast* of February 24, 1949, page 141, we find the following: "Whereas it cannot be shown that either Titus or Timothy, evangelists, were *ever under* any eldership *after* they began their work of evangelism, it can be definitely shown that both of them were *over* the eldership of at least one (and that's enough). Timothy was placed over the eldership at Ephesus by apostolic authority. And, Ephesus was an old, large, and established church which had had elders for years *when* this happened. Read all of First Timothy, understandingly. Titus, on the other hand, just a plain evangelist, was placed by apostolic authority over all the churches in Crete. Among his duties was the appointment of elders. Since an evangelist is given power to exercise 'all authority' over a number of churches and, whereas, an elder has only partial authority in only *one* congregation, it follows that the authority of the evangelist supersedes that of the elder or the eldership. Hence, Titus was *over* any eldership you might name in Crete. If not, why not?"

The direction of thought in this article is wrong and scripturally untrue. The Bible teaches that the elders have the OVERSIGHT of the flock which is among them. If the evangelist is among the flock he is under the oversight of the elders. Titus and Timothy would be included. No passage in all the Bible teaches that any evangelist, as such, ever had the oversight of one person in the church, must less a congregation or several congregations, Timothy and Titus included. Titus was told to "rebuke with all authority" (Titus 2:15), but that is a far cry from "oversee with all authority." The authority of an evangelist is toward the preaching of the word. This, indeed, is a most dangerous doctrine and leads directly to the popery of Romanism. This dereliction of plain truth by those who wear the appellation *Gospel Preacher* is deplorable.

#### F. *Elders exercising too much authority over preachers.*

Many times elders will keep placing their own responsibilities upon the preacher until he is actually trying to do all the work of the eldership. This is taking too much authority on the part of the eldership. Christ did not give the elders authority to delegate their responsibilities to others. They may assign certain work to others to do, but the OVERSIGHT and responsibilities for such can never be assigned to another.

Then some elders try to control a preacher when he is beyond the bounds of their authority. Some have asked: "Do the elders of one congregation have the oversight of a preacher who regularly works with them but goes away for a meeting to another locality? Are the elders still over him while he works there?" The answer is, NO. And the simple reason is that the elders cannot oversee ANY WORK beyond the local church of which they are elders. The elders where he is in the meeting at the time he is there have the oversight over him and his work. A congregation may send a preacher into a new field of labor and support him, but they do not exercise the oversight over him or

those converts where he is preaching in that work. They may discipline him for an unchristian conduct while away in a meeting after he returns, or they may withdraw their support from him and mark him as a false teacher if he does not continue true to the word while at some other place preaching, but that is the extent of their authority over an evangelist whom they may be supporting when he is not laboring among them. When we study the scope of authority of elders this truth will become more evident.

## THE ELDERSHIP AND APOSTASY

### I. THE MEANING OF APOSTASY

The word *apostasy* is not found in the Bible by that term, but the expression, "depart from the faith" is exactly what Webster says *apostasy* means. In I Timothy 4:1 we read: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." This is a prediction of an apostasy to come during the latter times, but here it does not tell where and how it will come—only WHEN. But Paul tells us that this apostasy—"the mystery of iniquity"—was already at work as he wrote the second letter to the Thessalonians (2:7).

We ask, WHERE will the departing from the faith begin, and HOW will it develop? Does the Bible tell us? We read where Paul called the elders from Ephesus to meet him at Miletus and there he gave them the charge to watch themselves and all the flock among them (Acts 20:28). He then adds: "For I know this," (this was a prophecy which Paul knew by revelation,) "that after my departing" (after his death, for he spoke of his departure being near as death approached—2 Tim. 4:6) 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."

As to WHERE this apostasy would come, Paul said it would come from among the elders of the church. All real apostasy from truth begins there directly or indirectly. The eldership creates, or allows to be created, some innovation in the church. They become divided over matters and carry it to the whole church for settlement; or they become weak in the discipline and allow worldliness to corrupt the flock of God. As long as the eldership is pure and godly the church in that place will be strong.

As to the HOW, Paul said it would come by "grievous wolves" entering to devour the flock by false teaching; and some of the elders themselves will speak perverse things to lead away disciples after them. History gives us the full picture of this prophecy of Paul. The *apostasy* depicted in the New Testament was to come "in the latter times," through the eldership of the church, and by false teaching and deception, even within and from among the eldership.

There is a very close relationship between corruption in the eldership of the church and the apostasy. Great care should be taken in selecting and appointing men to be elders because the wrong men can lead to a complete departing of the whole congregation from the faith. That is

one reason why this matter is of a most serious nature to the purity of the church of Christ.

## II. HOW APOSTASY DEVELOPED AMONG THE ELDERS

Apostasy is a slow working of error. It is a slow departure from the truth. One does not realize that he is drifting, in most cases, until he has gone into apostasy or very near it. Its working is like the facial change of a man. We take a picture and in ten years take another and notice the radical change in the face and features of a man, yet we do not really see the change from day to day because it is so gradual. Apostasy may well be called the cancer of the soul. Like this horrible disease of the body, it begins small and unnoticed and gradually works its way through and around the vital parts of the body until, by its slow working and growth, the body succumbs to its deadly work. It is often too late when the disease is located. The best and only safe-guard against this evil power in the church is a periodical and complete check-up often. This slow persistent working of apostasy is what devoured the early church, and it is what hinders the church today.

Apostasy follows three well defined steps. (1) A change in the divine pattern for the oversight of the church. The governing power must be changed before anything else can be changed. As long as the proper authority remains in the proper place and proper way in the church, apostasy is impossible. (2) The second step is to go beyond the word of God. These corrupt practices religiously must come from some authority beyond the Bible. Something must be added. Once the governing part of the local church is set aside and another substituted, the next step may be taken, and this consists of adding some practice which is not authorized in the Bible, or changing some doctrine of the Bible to suit man's desires. (3) The third step is into complete departure from the truth of God. If one change in the divine order is allowed, who can stop further changes? Paul warned against any advance beyond what is written. (I Cor. 4:6). The first step beyond what is written opens the way for any number of steps one would desire to take, and the person who takes the first step can never criticise or censure the one who takes ten or twenty, or even goes completely away from the Bible. How can the man who takes the first step from God's authority by disregarding the divine organization of the church justly censure or correct the man who has gone further and denied the divinity of Jesus, or has denied the inspiration of the Bible? Is not one as much in disobedience as the other? Regarding this very principle James said to keep all the law, yet to disobey in one point is the same as disobeying in all points. (James 2:10). How many commandments of God must one disobey to be lost? It can be easily answered by the principle James gives.

Let us notice briefly just how this apostasy worked in the eldership

of the early church. The following is a very brief summary of the working of many years. If the reader is interested in a more thorough study of the development of the various denominational systems in their departure from God's order, he is referred to any good, authoritative church-historian or any contemporary writer with these events.

A. The first step was taken when the bishops of a congregation decided to elect a chairman or spokesman for them, and gradually allowed this chairman or spokesman to become their chief. After a few years of this arrangement it was easy to drift into the practice of all other elders of that congregation submitting in most matters to the judgment and demands of the chief elder. This became the general practice in the larger congregations and finally developed into the office of *archbishop*. No doubt this did not appear to those involved to be a serious thing. It was just an "expedient," a method to increase the efficiency of the eldership. But it was a step toward apostasy.

B. This move that created the office of ARCHBISHOP led to another departure. After a few years the *archbishop* in the larger cities began to reach out and take under control the smaller churches in surrounding towns. Two reasons may be given for this arrangement: (1) The educational and influential superiority of the city bishops over the country bishops. (2) The financial and numerical pre-eminence of the city churches over the country churches. This action came as a direct result of the archbishop idea. The same idea is in process of development within the churches today. The elderships of "big" churches are having the elderships of "little" churches channel their money and authority through the "big" churches to do "big" things. Anything larger than the local church is not the New Testament church. The second step was to have ONE elder over several churches.

C. The third step was to organize the archbishops. These chairman bishops of several towns were organized into a "diocese" or county. From the archbishops a chief was appointed. This developed into the office of *Cardinal* or chief archbishop. This act puts one elder over a section of the country.

D. Still later one of the cardinals was elected from the group to become the chief elder over the church universal, now called the *Pope*. When this step was taken, the next naturally led to claiming authority for this chief, elder which has never been given to any man, not even the apostles. This is the system of departure that started among the elders in a small way. No doubt it seemed to them such a small thing that one would have been branded a "crank" or "hobby-rider" to voice an objection to it. The departure was so gradual that it was not noticed by the majority of people. The same can be true in the church today.

### III. SCRIPTURAL ELDERS ARE THE SAFEGUARD AGAINST APOSTASY

There is a NEED for elders today in the church. Many things must be decided about the work and worship of the church. The time of assembling, the place of meeting, the order in the worship, the preparation for the worship, who shall preach and teach, and many other decisions are important. Somebody must do this directing. Is it to be decided by a majority vote, by the preacher or by the eldership? The latter is to make such decisions and is responsible to God for them being done scripturally. We need elders today in the church to do the work of overseeing the flock.

There is no greater work nor higher responsibility than that of the bishops of the church. When one reaches the good degree of Christianity that is required of the elders he has reached the very peak of usefulness in the church.

The elders need a pat on the back and a word of encouragement from the members of the church when they do a good work. We all need encouragement, but especially so when the heavy responsibility of the oversight is laid upon the shoulders of a man. The elders would work much harder and more earnestly if we would give them the encouragement they deserve when their work is well executed.

There must always be a plurality of elders in each congregation. This is one of the best safeguards against apostasy. The following passages of Scripture will show that there was a plurality of elders in each church: Acts 11:29, 30; 14:23; 15:4; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 4:14; 5:17 Titus 1:5; James 5:14; I Peter 5:1, 2.

There can never be less than two elders in each local church. Some ask, How many should there be in a congregation? The answer is, "If ANY man . . ." Any and all men in each congregation who can qualify should be appointed. The more qualified men appointed, the more work can be done and the more efficiently it can be done.

Another question of interest: If all the elders die except one, can he remain an elder in that congregation? He can if others are appointed to take the places of those who have died, but he cannot be scripturally THE ELDER. That is exactly what he would be if he remained the only elder. There is no place in all the New Testament that teaches a one man rule in the local church. This would not disqualify him as an elder but it would disqualify his rule as THE ELDER.

Each church must be autonomous (self-governed). If one congregation drifted from the truth, others would not be affected by governmental ties. With each church governed by its own elders it safeguards against apostasy of the whole church.



A plurality of elders in each church will provide a supply for the deficiency in any one man. The strong, spiritual characteristics of several men blended together is a safer oversight than just one man.

#### IV. WHY MORE MEN ARE NOT QUALIFIED TO BE ELDERS

No doubt the first reason to mention why many are not qualified elders is the lack of energy and will to develop the godly characteristics needed to be a scriptural elder. It is not easy to obtain a good knowledge of the Bible, to live a life above reproach, and to govern and guide a family so as to keep them in the way of the Lord. That is what one must do to become an elder.

A second reason is that there has been such mass substitutions for the eldership today that many have grown to disregard Bible instructions for the elders. Many churches have substituted an office called *Leaders* to take the place of the eldership. These *leaders* do not have to be qualified according to the Bible, and since they hold the same office, the qualifications are considered unimportant.

A third reason is the abuse of the eldership in some quarters. This has caused men not to desire the work. When they do not desire the office of a bishop, they will make no effort to qualify. The reason many do not desire this work of oversight is because they have seen and heard the continual abuse and complaining of churches toward the elders. They have heard members speak of them in an unchristian way. They have seen them accused of many things of which they were not guilty. The lack of respect and honor for the bishops has caused many young men never to set their goal to be an elder.

The work of efficient elders is the highest, most noble and needed work among us today. The man who qualifies and does the work of an elder is as near God as he can get on this earth. They are deserving of the deepest and greatest of our love and respect, for "they watch for your souls, as they that must give account."

The fourth reason is that the lack of preaching and teaching on the subject has caused many to fail to qualify. Many preachers have purposely tried to keep men from reaching the point to be recognized as qualified men for the eldership. Others have been so unlearned on the subject that they could not preach the truth on the eldership. They do not want to lose any power or control over the church where they preach. In some places the membership of the churches have never heard a gospel sermon on the subject of the qualifications for the eldership. One might as well leave out any other phase of scriptural teaching as this one.