

**A TREATISE**  
**on**  
**THE ELDERSHIP**

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# INTRODUCTORY

Does the New Testament prescribe a form of church government? Protestants have commonly answered this question in the negative; and having thus answered, they have proceeded to adopt such forms of government as best suited the tastes and judgement of the various parties into which they are divided. We think that before proceeding thus far, they should have considered the more fundamental question, Does the New Testament authorize any government at all in the Church? If it does not, then every form of church government is a usurpation. It is altogether certain that without divine authority no human being has a right to control the religious conduct of his neighbor, especially to cut off his neighbor from church membership or the privileges pertaining thereto.

But it is not denied that the New Testament authorizes the exercise of government in the church; it is only denied that the *form* of government is prescribed. It is even admitted by many that a certain *form* of government existed in the apostolic age; yet denied that this form was intended to be perpetual.

It is not the purpose of this treatise to fully discuss this question, or to exhibit in detail the New Testament form of church government; but the theme which we have chosen assumes the existence of an eldership in the church, and the development of it will necessarily involve the settlement of the

more fundamental question above stated. If it be ascertained that any church government at all is divinely authorized, it must appear as a very singular circumstance if the form of that government is not indicated. Moreover, if we find a form of government in existence in the apostolic churches, we shall demand something above mere human judgement or experience to justify an abandonment of it, or even a modification of it. No less than the same authority which institutes can abolish. What God had instituted he alone may abolish. He may abolish by his word, or he may abolish providentially by finally rendering impossible what had once been instituted but unless it is abolished every divine appointment must stand forever.

J. W. McGARVEY

# 1. THERE IS SUCH AN OFFICE

After the above preliminary statements, we proceed to inquire, Is there an office in the church called the Eldership?

The common English version of the New Testament does not contain the term *eldership*, but the term *presbuterion* in the original should be so translated. This uniformity requires; for the adjective *presbuteros* is uniformly translated *elder*, and the only rendering of *presbuterion* which harmonizes with this is *eldership*. This term should occur three times in the English Testament, twice having reference to the Jewish Sanhedrin, and once to the eldership in the church. [Lu. 22:66; Acts 22:5, 1 Ti. 4:14](#). In this last passage our English version has *presbytery*, which is the Greek word anglicised, and is the exact equivalent of *eldership*. The body so styled, as the term itself indicates, was composed of the individual elders of the church referred to.

But why should we argue a proposition which is not denied? It is indisputable that there was a body of men in the primitive churches called *elders*, and that so many of these as were found in one congregation constituted the *eldership* of that congregation.

Individuals have been found who admit all this, and admit that there should be an eldership in the churches of all ages; who also ascribe to the eldership of modern churches the functions which belonged to those in the primitive age; but

who deny that the term eldership designates an *office*, or that elders are properly styled *officers*. They deny, indeed, the existence of office in the church, and would use the term *work* where the term *office* is commonly employed. We regard the distinction as one between words rather than ideas; for one of a body of men, who has any *work* specially assigned to him by the body, is an officer of that body, in the full import of the term. If, then, we shall, in the course of our investigation, ascertain that the elders of the church are charged with the performance of public duties assigned to them by their brethren, we shall thereby know that they are entitled to the name of officers. If, after this, any shall still prefer not to *call* them officers, while recognizing all the functions with which they are charged, we care not to have a war about words with such persons.

## 2. TITLES OF THE OFFICE

The term eldership means *the office of an elder*. This assertion will be proved in proving that an elder is an officer. The termination *ship* appended to the title of an officer, as *secretaryship*, *auditorship*, *governorship*, is indicative of office.

But there are some, who deny that the term elder is ever used in the New Testament in an official sense. They hold that it always means *older person*, and that the eldership of a church consists of the older men of the church. We are now to test the correctness of this assumption, and to determine whether *elder* is ever used as an official title.

It is well known that the term elder is an adjective in the comparative degree, and that its primary meaning is *older*. When used as a substantive, it means an *older person*. The same is true of its Greek representative, *presbuteros*. It is also well known that many words have, in addition to their primary meaning, a technical or official signification. For example, the familiar adjective *general* is sometimes used as the title of a military officer. Major, greater, is the title of another; and *corporal* which means pertaining to the body is the title of still another. So the terms secretary, auditor, judge, mate, professor, and many others, have each an official as well as a primary signification. So it may be with the term elder. Whether it is so

or not is to be determined, as the same question is determined in reference to these other words, by usage. We will now examine its New Testament usage sufficiently to settle this question.

The following statement is made concerning Paul and Barnabas while engaged in their first missionary tour: "When they had *ordained them elders* in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." [Acts xiv: 23](#). The term here rendered *ordained* is *cheirotoneo*. It is compounded of *cheir*, the *hand*, and *teino*, *to stretch forth*, and its primary meaning is *to stretch forth the hand*. But from the fact that bodies of men frequently expressed a choice by an elevation of the hand, it acquired the meaning of *to choose* or *to appoint* by an extension of the hand; and finally it came to mean to appoint without reference to the method of appointing. Such is the testimony of scholars, and it is confirmed by the usage of the term. It occurs in only one other place in the New Testament, where it is said of an unnamed brother whom Paul sent to Corinth with Titus, that he "was *chosen* by the churches." [2 Cor. viii: 19](#). How the churches choose him, whether by a show of hands or in some other way, is not determined by this term, nor by the context. Another instance of its use is found in Josephus. He represents Alexander Bala, the Syrian King who claimed jurisdiction over Judea, as writing to Jonathan, the brother of Judas Maccabaeus, these words: "We therefore *do*



*ordain* thee this day high priest of the Jews." Here there was no stretching out the hand, but an appointment to office by a single individual, and through the instrumentality of a letter. Clearer proof of the definition we have given could not be demanded.

Substituting this definition for the term *ordained* in the passage we are considering, we read that Paul and Barnabas "*appointed*" for them elders in every church. These elders, then, were made such by appointment; but Paul and Barnabas certainly did not make *older men* by appointment; neither would the passage make complete sense if it read, "They appointed for them men in every church." To complete the sense, it would be necessary to add the office or position to which the older men were appointed. The considerations show that the term is here used not its primary sense, but in a sense which designates position obtained by appointment. But an appointment puts men into office, and *elder* is therefore the official title conferred by this appointment. The process of appointment will be considered in another part of this treatise.

The same conclusion follows from Paul's statement to Titus: "I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting and *ordain elders* in every city." [Ti. 1:5](#). The term here rendered *ordain* is *kathisteemi*, the Greek word most commonly used in both the New Testament and the Greek version of the Old Testament, for appointing to

office. It is used to express the appointment of Joseph as governor over Egypt, and of the other officers under him, [Gen. xli: 33-34](#); [Acts vii: 10](#); for the appointment of David as ruler over Israel, [2nd Sam. vi: 21](#); for the appointment of rulers over household servants, [Matt. xxiv: 45](#); of a judge in civil jurisprudence, [Ex. ii: 14](#); [Acts vii: 27](#); and of Jewish high priests, [Heb. v: 1](#); [viii: 3](#).

Now, the fact that this term so frequently expressed the idea of appointment to office does not necessarily prove that it has this meaning in any given passage. Whether it does or not, is to be determined by the context, and we should always try its primary meaning first. Its primary meaning is to *set* or *place* locally. It is so used twice in the New Testament, [Acts xvii: 5](#); [Jas. iii: 6](#). But Paul could not mean that Titus was to set elders or place elders in every church. There would be no good sense in such a rendering, and therefore, the secondary sense of the term must be adopted. With the universal consent of scholars and critics, we render it *appoint*. Titus, then was to *appoint* elders in every city, and the term elders designates the office to which they were appointed.

We shall now regard it as an established fact that the term elder is sometimes used in the New Testament as an official title. In this fact we find further proof of our first proposition, that there is such an office in the church as the eldership. We shall find, as we proceed, still further confirmation of both

these conclusions. In the meantime, we must prescribe a rule by which to distinguish between those instances in which the term elder is used in its primary sense and those in which it has its official sense. The law of the context, the first great law for ascertaining the meaning of ambiguous terms, must be our guide. When the context indicates that a comparison as to age is intended by the writer, we must give the term its primary sense of *elder*; but when the context shows that the persons spoken of sustain an official relation to the church, it must be understood in its official sense. In nearly all instances the distinction is drawn; in a few, the meaning is somewhat uncertain. We shall see and know more of these instances as we proceed further with the discussion.

The second title of this office which we shall consider is expressed by the Greek word *episcopee*, rendered in the English version once *bishoprick* and once *office of a bishop*. It is derived from the verb *episcopeo*, whose primary meaning is *to look upon*; but in usage it conveys the idea of looking upon with a view to inspection or control. The noun *episcopee*, therefore, means *inspection* or *oversight*; and from the fact that visiting is often done for the purpose of inspection, it is sometimes rendered *visitation*. The *visitations* of God were sometimes for good and sometimes for evil to the party visited, and this term is used in both cases. See [Lu. xix: 44](#); [Is. x: 3](#), *Septuagint*.

We have also, from the same root, the masculine noun *episcopos* which means the man who performs the act designated by *episcopeo*, and is best represented in English by *overseer*. The term *bishop*, by which it is most usually rendered in the common version, is objectionable on two accounts: *first*, it does not correspond in meaning to the original; *second*, it conveys a meaning to the mass of readers not attached to the original word. *Overseer* corresponds to the original, in etymology, and also in current meaning, and it is the only English word which does so. It should, therefore, be adopted into the English version, and into the speech of those who would call bible things by bible names.

Now, it is not claimed for either of these substantives that in its primary sense it refers to an office in the church; for primarily, neither has any allusion to the church. But it is claimed that like the term *elder*, they acquired an appropriated sense, one of them becoming the title of a church officer, and the other the name of his office. The proof of this we will now present; and we beg the reader to remember, lest he grow weary of these apparently useless inquiries, that we are now discoursing upon this subject as though nothing were known of it, and we must therefore take nothing as granted. We happen also to know that there is practical need for this part of our inquiry.

### 3. THE TITLES EXPLAINED

1. The term *episcopos*, *overseer*, is used as the equivalent of *elder* in its official sense. This is clear from the use of the two terms in the [20th chapter of Acts](#). Luke says, that from Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called the *elders* of the church. Here, according to a rule already established, *the elders* of the church must mean, not the older men, but those called elders officially. But Paul says to these elders, "Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*." The elders, then, and the *overseers* in the church at Ephesus were the same persons, and *overseers* is but another title by which they were known. Moreover, they had been made overseers by the Holy Spirit, which implies that by some process dictated by the Holy Spirit, they had been formally placed in that position. This corresponds to the appointment by which we have seen that persons entered the eldership, and is sufficient to establish the presumption that they were made overseers by the same appointment which made them elders. We have further proof of this use of the term in the [epistle to Titus](#). Paul says, "I left thee in Crete that thou shouldst ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee; if any be blameless," &c.; and then adds, "For an overseer must be blameless." Now, the fact that an overseer should be blameless, could be no reason why a blameless person must be ordained elder, unless an elder is the same as an overseer. It is the same as if I should say to a literary society of students, Appoint a President of your

society, if any be found acquainted with parliamentary rules; for the chairman of such a society should be acquainted with these rules. Now, in this example, if a person knew nothing more of the word chairman than its etymology would indicate, *the man of the chair*, he could not fail to see that I used the term as another title for the President of the society. It is equally clear in the case before us, that Paul uses the term overseer as another title for him who is called elder.

2. The term *episcopee* is used to designate the position occupied by the *episcopos* or overseers. This is seen in [1 Ti. iii: 1-2](#). Paul says, "If a man desires *episcopee* he desires a good work. An *episcopos*, then, must be blameless," &c. Here it is clear that he who desires *episcopee*, desires to be *episcopos*. If *episcopos* is overseer, then *episcopee* must be the position of an overseer; and what shall we call this position in English? Mr. Green translates it "*a post of oversight*," not a bad expression of the meaning. He renders it in the same way in [Acts 1:20](#). "*His post of oversight* let another take." I prefer the single word *overseership*, because it is shorter, and corresponds more closely to the correlative term *overseer*. Whatever be the expression, however, the idea remains the same, and the term designates the office held by an overseer.

It is here objected by some, that we should not call the *overseership* an *office*, because Paul in this passage expressly calls it a *work*: "If any man desire the *overseership*,

he desires a good work." Undoubtedly, it is a work; and so is every office in either church or State, unless it be a mere sinecure. The fact that it is a work makes it none the less an office. If the President of the United States were to say, "He who desires a foreign mission desires a heavy work," it would not be inferred from the term work that a foreign mission is not an office.

The conclusion thus naturally and necessarily springing from these passages, of Scripture will be confirmed as we proceed to develop the functions of the office. We will find that the elders or overseers of the church are charged with such duties, and entrusted with such authority as makes them officers of the church in the fullest sense of the term.

Before leaving this branch of the subject, we must notice another question which has caused confusion in some minds. It has been assumed that the elders constitute a class out of which the overseers are chosen; the elders being the older men of the church, and the overseers the officers. We have already answered this question by showing that the term elders is used in an official sense to designate the same persons as the overseers. The elders of the church at Ephesus were all embraced in the term overseers; for, as we have seen, *the* elders, not merely a part of them, had been made overseers.

The third and last official title which we shall notice is *pastor* or *shepherd*. This term, in the substantive form, is

used but once in the New Testament with reference to church officials. It is in the well known passage, [Eph. iv: 11](#), where *pastors* are enumerated among the gifts bestowed upon the Church by Christ. The evidence that this term designates the *overseers* or *elders*, is conclusive, and may be briefly stated. The Greek term for shepherd is *poimeen*, and the verb *poimaino* means *to do the work of a shepherd*. Now, he to whom this verb applies is a shepherd, just as he who sows is a sower, he who reaps is a reaper, he who speaks is a speaker, he who sings is a singer, &c., &c. But Paul exhorts the overseers in Ephesus "*to be shepherds* to the church." [Acts xx: 28](#); and Peter exhorts the elders of the churches to which he writes, "*Be shepherds* to the flock of God which is among you," and promise that when the "*chief shepherd*" shall appear, they shall receive a crown of glory. They then, were shepherds and Christ, the chief shepherd.

The, term *pastor*, the Latin for shepherd, has come into common use from the influence of the Latin version of the Scriptures. There is one all-sufficient reason for preferring our own Anglo-Saxon term *shepherd*. It is found in the fact that *pastor* has become perverted by sectarian usage, and designates in popular phraseology, an entirely different office from the one to whom it is applied in the Scriptures. It has become a synonym for a settled preacher, and is often used for the purpose of distinguishing the preacher from those who are Scripturally called the *pastors* of the church. It will



perhaps be impossible to recover the term from this abuse, and therefore, it is better to throw it away.

Another good reason for preferring shepherd is, that its primary meaning is familiar to the most illiterate reader, and the metaphor by which the overseer is thus styled is perfectly intelligible to every one; whereas, the term *pastor* is known to the masses only in its appropriated sense.

## 4. DUTIES OF THE OFFICE

The title of an office is often taken from some characteristic duty belonging to it. Thus the title President is taken from the act of presiding; Secretary from the act of writing; Auditor (*hearer*) from the act of hearing financial reports. In such cases, the information derived from the title is generally meagre. In some instances, however, offices newly created adopt the titles of previously existing offices which are similar to them; and in such instances the titles carry with them all of their previous significance, except so far as this is modified by the nature of the new office. Thus the term President, which first meant one who presides over an assembly and enforces order in its proceedings, when transferred to the chief officer of a college, and to the chief magistrate of the United States, carried with it the chief part of its previously acquired meaning. Now, it so happens that all the titles by which the Elder of a church is known were adopted from previously existing offices, and brought with them into their new application much of their former significance. That significance will enable us, therefore, to obtain a general idea of the duties of the office, and to better appreciate the more specific statements of the Apostles which will afterwards be considered.

The title *Elder*, which is most frequently used by the Apostles, and which is still the most popular of these titles, obtained an official signification among the Jews long before

its adoption into the Christian Church. Originally it designated the older men, or heads of families in Israel, who exercised a patriarchal government over their posterity: See [Ex. iv: 29; xix: 7](#). In the days of Christ it had become the title of the rulers of the Jewish synagogues, and of one of the classes composing the Sanhedrim. Reliable information in reference to the functions of the office among the Jews is quite meagre; but it is sufficient to justify the assertion that those who enjoyed the title exercised authority in some capacity. When it was adopted, therefore, into the Christian Church, it brought with it at least this general idea, that those to whom it was applied were rulers in the church. The exact nature and limits of their authority it could not of course designate.

The term *episcopus* brought with it a more clearly defined significance, and furnishes more definite information in reference to the duties of the office. Among the Athenians it was the title of "magistrates sent out to tributary cities, to organize and govern them." (See Robinson's N. T. Lexicon, and references there given.) Among the Jews it had very much that variety of application which the term overseer now has in English. It is used in the Septuagint for the officers appointed by Josiah to oversee the workmen engaged in repairing the temple, [2 Ch. xxxiv: 12, 17](#); for the overseers of workmen employed in rebuilding Jerusalem after the captivity; [Ne. xi: 5, 14](#); for the overseers of the Levites on duty in Jerusalem; [Ne. xi: 22](#); for the overseers of the singers in the temple worship; [Ne. xii: 42](#); and for subordinate civil rulers; Jos. Ant.

10. 4. 2. In all these instances it designates persons who have oversight of the persons for the purpose of directing their labors and securing a faithful performance of the tasks assigned them.

Such a word when applied to a class of officers in the Christian Church, necessarily carried with it the significance already attached to it. It indicated, both to Jew and Greek, that the persons so styled were appointed to superintend the affairs of the church, to direct the activities of the members, to see that everything was done that should be done, and that it was done by the right person, at the right time, and in the right way. Anything less than this would be insufficient to justify the title *overseer* as it was currently employed in that age. The details of the process by which all this was accomplished will appear as we advance.

The title Shepherd is still more significant than either of the other two. The Jewish shepherd was at once the ruler, the guide, the protector, and the companion of his flock. Often, like the shepherds to whom the angel announced the glad tidings of great joy, he slept upon the ground beside his sheep at night. Sometimes, when prowling wolves came near to rend and scatter the flock, his courage was put to the test: ([Jno. x: 12](#)); and even the lion and the bear in early ages rose up against the brave defender of the sheep. [1 Sam. xvii: 34-36](#). He did not *drive* them to water and to pasturage; but he called his own sheep by name, so familiar was he with every one of

them, and he *led* them out, and went *before* them, and the sheep *followed* him, for they knew his voice. [Jno. x: 3, 4.](#)

A relation so authoritative and at the same time so tender as this could not fail to find a place in the poetry of Hebrew prophets, and the parables of the Son of God. David's poetic eye detects the likeness between the shepherd's care of his flock and the care of God for Israel, and most beautifully does he give expression to it in lines familiar to every household, and admired in every land:

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leadeth me beside the still waters  
He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths  
of righteousness for his names' sake.  
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow  
of death, I will fear no evil: For thou art  
with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." [Ps.  
xxiii.](#)

The same beautiful image is employed by Isaiah, when with prophetic eye he sees the great Persian king gathering together the scattered sheep of Israel in distant Babylon, and sending them back from their long captivity. He exclaims in the name of the Lord, "Cyrus is my *shepherd*, and shall perform all my pleasures; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundations shall be laid." [xlv 28.](#) But he sings a still sweeter note in the same

strain, when he foresees the life and labors of the Son of God, and exclaims, "He shall feed his flock like a *shepherd*; he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." [xl: 11](#). The Saviour himself re-echoes the sentiment, and says, "I am the good shepherd," "I know my sheep, and am known by mine." "I lay down my life for the sheep." [Jno. x: 14, 15](#). Even the less poetic Paul is touched by the beautiful metaphor, and makes a prayer to "the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of sheep," ([Heb. xiii: 20](#)); while Peter says to his brethren, "Ye were as sheep going astray; but now are returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." [1 Pet. ii: 25](#).

A word thus highly exalted by the pens of prophets, and even by the lips of Jesus, almost appears too sacred to represent the relation and responsibilities of an uninspired laborer in the cause of God. But even before the church came into existence it had been consecrated to this usage, and was a favorite term with the later prophets by which to designate the religious leaders of Israel. Jeremiah pronounces a woe upon the shepherds of his day who destroyed and scattered Israel, and predicts the time when God would bring the sheep again to their folds, and set up shepherds over them who would be real shepherds to them. [Jer. xxiii: 1-4](#). The connection shows that the prediction has reference to the Christian age. Ezekiel speaks in the same strain, and in almost the identical thoughts of Jeremiah, except that in

contrast with the unfaithful shepherds of his age, he says: "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David: he shall feed them, he shall be their shepherd." [Ez. xxiv: 1-23](#).

With such a history, the word shepherd came into the terminology of the church with a most clearly defined secondary meaning. When applied as a title in the church it necessarily represented its subject as the ruler, the guide, the protector, and the companion of the members of the church. When Paul and Peter, therefore, exhorted the elders to be shepherds to the flock of God, all these important and tender relations were indicated by the word.

We have already taken notice of that general conception of the duties assigned the eldership, which is derived from the title applied to the office. In the confirmation of the conclusions drawn from this and overseer are enjoined upon the elder by express command.

In two distinct passages already quoted, ([Acts xx: 28; 1 Pet. v: 2](#)) the elders are exhorted to be *shepherds* to the church. This exhortation, or rather this apostolic command, has failed to make its due impression on the English reader, because of the very inadequate translation of *poimaino* in the common version. It occurs eleven times, and is [seven times](#) rendered *feed*, and [four times](#) *rule*. When connected with church work it is uniformly rendered *feed*. No doubt the translators intended by this rendering to make their version

intelligible to their uneducated readers in England and Scotland, where very little is known of a shepherd's work except *feeding* the sheep through the long winters. But this attempt at adaptation has led to serious misapprehension; for even to this day, and in America as well as in Great Britain, the term *feed* in these passages has been understood by the masses as a metaphor for public teaching, and the whole work here enjoined is supposed to be accomplished when a suitable address is delivered to the saints on the Lord's day. Many an elder has imagined that the chief part of his work is accomplished when he has called together the flock once a week, or it may be once a month, and give them their regular supply of food, even when the food is given is nothing better than empty husks. And many an evangelist, miscalling himself a pastor, has labored under the same mistake. Let it be noted, then, and never be forgotten, that the term employed in these passages expressed *the entire work of a shepherd*, of which *feeding* was very seldom even a part in the country where this use of the term originated. The shepherds of Judea, and those of Asia Minor, *pastured* their sheep throughout the entire year. Their duty was to guide them from place to place to protect them from wild beast, and to keep them from straying; but not to *feed* them.

The Apostle Paul leaves us in no doubt as to his own use of the term in question; for after the general command, "Be shepherds to the church," he proceeds to distribute the idea by adding these words: "For I know this, that after my



departure shall ravenous 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. Therefore, *watch*; and remember that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." [Acts xx: 28-31](#). Here, continuing the metaphor of the flock, he forewarns the shepherds against ravenous wolves, who can be no other than teachers of error who would come into Ephesus from abroad, such, for example, as those who had already infested the Galatian churches; ([Gal. i: 6-7; v: 12](#);) and he commands them to *watch*. He also predicts that men of their own number, like unruly rams of the flock, would rise up, speaking *perverse* things, and seeking to lead away disciples after them. The shepherds were to watch against these also, and as they saw symptoms of such movements, within, they were to "warn every one, night and day," as Paul had done.

Here, then, are two specifications under the generic idea of acting the shepherd, and they are strictly analogous to the work of the literal shepherd. It is made the duty of the eldership, *first*, to protect the congregation against false teachers from abroad; *second*, to guard carefully against the influence of schismatics within the congregation; *third*, to *keep watch* both within and without, like a shepherd night and day watching his flock, so as to be ready to act on the first appearance of danger from either direction.

The first of these duties is again emphasized in the epistle to Titus, where Paul requires that elders shall be able, by sound teaching, both to exhort and convict the gainsayers, and adds: "For there are many vain and unruly talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped." [Ti. i: 9-11](#). The duty of watchfulness is also mentioned again, and in a manner which shows most impressively its supreme importance. Paul says, "Obey them who have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they *watch for your souls*, as they that must give account." [Heb. xiii: 17](#). From these words it appears that the object of the watching enjoined, is not merely to keep out false teaching and to suppress incipient schism, but to do these in order to save souls from being lost. That priceless treasure for which Jesus laid down his life is at stake, and the elders of each church, like the shepherds of each flock, must give account to the owner of the flock for every soul that is lost. The task of Jacob, concerning which he said to Laban, "That which was torn of beast I brought not to thee, I bore the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night," is a true symbol of the task assigned the shepherds of the Church of God. Well might they all exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

The duty of "taking oversight" is enjoined upon the elders in express terms, and the expression is used as the equivalent of acting the shepherd. Peter says, "*Be shepherds to the flock, taking the oversight thereof.*" [1 Pet. v: 2](#). The essential

thought in overseership, that of *ruling*, is frequently enjoined. Paul says to Timothy, "Let the elders that *rule well* be counted worthy of double honor." [1 Ti. v: 17](#). The Greek word here rendered *rule* is *proisteemi*, the etymological meaning of which is *to stand or place one object before another*. But the fact that rulers stand before their subjects, with all the eyes of the latter looking to them for direction, led to the established usage of this term in the sense of ruling. It is so defined in the lexicons, and so used in both classic and Hellenistic Greek. It expresses the rule of a father over his family, [1 Ti. iii: 4-5, 12](#); of a deputy over a district, 1 Mac. v: 15; of a King over his subjects, Jos. Ant. viii: 1, 2, 3, and of the elders over the church, [1 Ti. v: 17; 1 Thess. v: 12; Ro. xii: 5-8](#). By use of still another Greek word, Paul expresses in the epistle to the Hebrews the same general idea of ruling. He says: ([13: 7](#)), "Remember *them who have the rule over you*, who have spoken to you the word of God," again, ([verse 17](#)), "*Obey them that have the rule over you*, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account," &c.; and again, ([verse 24](#)), "Salute *them who have the rule over you*." The term here employed *heegeomai*, means primarily, *to lead*. When applied to the mind it means to think or suppose, because in this mental act the mind is *lead* to a conclusion. See [Acts xxvi: 2; Phil. ii: 3-6](#); et al. But the *present participle* of this verb came to be used in the sense of *ruler*, because a ruler is one who *leads*, sometimes, indeed, it means a *leader* in the sense of a *chief man*, as when Silas and Judas are called

"chief men among the brethren." [Acts xv: 22](#). When the idea of ruling is expressed by it, the fact is indicated in the context: e. g., Pharaoh made Joseph "ruler (*heegoumenon*) over Egypt," ([Acts vii: 10](#)), where the expression "over Egypt" indicates the relation of authority. So, in the second of the three examples under discussion, the terms *obey* and *submit yourselves* show that the relation of authority is expressed, and that the rendering of the participle should be *rulers*, or "*them who have ruled*."

Another duty of the eldership, distinct from the preceding, is that of *teaching*. By a mistake already mentioned, this duty has been supposed by many to be the chief work indicated by the term pastor or shepherd; but in the only place where the latter term occurs in the common version in its appropriated sense pastors are distinguished from teachers. "He gave some, apostles and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some *pastors* and *teachers*." The distinction here evidently made between pastors and teachers, does not imply that they are always different persons; for as one person might be both a prophet and an evangelist, so, for the same reason, he might be both a pastor and a teacher. But the distinction made shows that one might be a teacher and not a pastor. From other passages, however, we know that all pastors or shepherds, in addition to what is implied in this title, are also *teachers*. In the statement of their qualifications, Paul says that they must be "apt to teach," [1 Ti. iii: 2](#); and that they should be "able, by sound teaching, both

to exhort and to convict the gainsayers;" [Ti. i: 9](#). That they should be able to teach, necessarily implies the duty of teaching.

## 5. HOW TO BE EXAMPLES

Having pointed out, and stated in general terms, the duties of the office, we now inquire as to the manner in which these duties are performed. We will be led by this inquiry to consider more in detail the duties themselves, seeing that an essential part of every duty is the prescribed method of performing it.

Having collected together, and placed in a single group before me, all the Scripture specifications on this subject, I feel constrained to recognize as first of them all, the requirement that elders shall be examples to those over whom they are called to preside. It is not only required of them that they be examples, but being examples is as an essential element in the manner of executing their official duties. Peter exhorts Elders in these words: "Be shepherds to 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; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock." "Being examples to the flock" is one of the specifications of the manner of taking the oversight. The Apostle Paul indicates the same though, when, in the beginning of his admonitions to the Ephesian Elders, the charge, "Take heed to yourselves" is made to precede the charge, "Take heed to all the flock." [Acts xx: 28](#). He also holds the Elders up to the brethren as an example to be imitated, when he says, "Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith

follow, considering the end of their behavior." [Heb. xiii: 7](#). Here faith is considered as to its practical working in the behavior, and the Greek word rendered *follow*, means, more strictly, *imitate*. The disciples are required to *imitate* in behavior the faith of those who rule over them; and thus, indirectly, but most forcibly, these rulers are admonished that their example must be worthy of imitation. It is assumed, indeed, as a fact, the evidence of which should never be in doubt, that an example is actually presented in the lives of the Elders.

Jesus teaches the same idea under the figure of a shepherd and his flock. He says of the shepherd, "When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him." ([John x: 4](#).) There is no driving, but constant leading. A Judean shepherd going before his flock and calling them with a voice which they know and always follow, is an inimitably beautiful picture of the chief Shepherd himself, and of all the under shepherds, leading their flocks toward the gates of heaven. That voice never directed to a path which the shepherd himself did not tread; and even if it did the sheep would take no heed to it but ever followed the footsteps of the shepherd. How fearfully important that those footsteps should never vary from the strait and narrow way!

These admonitions are expressed in general terms, and cover all the duties of a christian life. To be examples to the flock, to go before and call the flock to follow after, is a

present a model not of one but of every virtue. To be worthy of imitation in faith and behavior, is to be free from habits that would be avoided. Shall we be content with the statement of these generalities, or shall we enter into details? Perhaps the Elder who reads this will think that the demands made upon him are sufficiently exacting even in these general terms; but at the risk of exciting his fears, and the further risk of some repetition hereafter, we venture to specify some of the items of behavior which constitute this example.

We revert again to Paul's conversation with the Ephesian Elders, and find him committing to them the following charge: "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." [Acts xx: 33-35](#). Thus the Elders are required, in addition to their labors for the church, to imitate Paul's example, and, by diligent attention to business, help to support the weak. and to exemplify the blessedness of giving. The importance of this is clearly seen in the fact, that Elders must teach the brethren to practice liberality, and must see to the enforcement of the law of God upon the covetous; neither of which is practicable unless they themselves set an example of liberality. For this reason also, in the directions to both Timothy and Titus, Paul prescribes that Elders shall not be "greedy of filthy lucre;" and



Peter directs that they shall take the oversight "not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." They are to keep themselves free from the appearance of sordid motives in their official action, as well as in their secular business. This forbid doing any official duty with a view to promoting business enterprises and equally forbids neglect of duty when the performance of it would involve pecuniary loss. An Elder whose secular business depends upon popular favor is tempted in both these directions. He must keep himself pure and above suspicion.

In the second place, the Elder is required to maintain a blameless reputation; [1 Tim. iii: 2; Ti. i: 7](#). This includes a great deal. He must not be "selfwilled;" for this excites self-will in those with whom he must deal, and causes them to speak evil of him. He must not be "soon angry," for the same reason. And for the additional reason that the moment he becomes angry he loses all his moral power over those whom he is seeking to influence. He must not be "given to wine," for it is disreputable, and will render him powerless in his efforts to control the intemperate. If the Elder drinks a little, his words will be like the idle winds to those who drink much. He must be "a lover of good men," for he will be judged by the company he keeps. He must be "sober", lest his levity should deprive him of weight; "just," lest he be suspected of dishonesty and partiality; "holy," lest his exhortations to holiness appear to be the cant of a hypocrite. All these specifications, and more, are

made by the apostles, and the Elder must not content himself a moment without the possession of them all.

If any Elder who reads this, after searching carefully into his own life, finds that he is not, in some good degree, setting the example herein described, let him at once either resign his position or amend his ways. It is a fearful thing to be placed in a position the very nature of which proclaims one an example to the church of God, if the example actually exhibited is not a good one. O that the great Shepherd and Overseer of all may guide the under shepherds, and help them to go before their flocks in the unerring pathway of truth and holiness.

## 6. HOW TO BE SHEPHERDS

The titles applied to the Eldership are well chosen, and constitute an exhaustive classification of its duties. When the Elders learn how to be shepherds, how to be overseers, and how to be teachers, they have learned how to discharge all the functions of their office. We propose now to inquire how they may perform those duties which belong to them as shepherds.

All the duties of a literal shepherd, as understood by the people who gave the word its religious significance, are embraced in these three: 1. To keep the sheep from straying. 2. To lead them to water and pasturage by day, and back to the fold, when need be, at night. 3. To protect them against all danger by night and by day. The pastoral, or shepherd duties of the Eldership, as the nature of the title shepherd and the apostolic precepts both require, correspond strictly to these three.

First then, in order to be a good shepherd, the Elder must exercise the utmost care to prevent individual sheep from straying away from the flock; and when one, as it sometimes will, eludes all vigilance and strays away, he is to be prompt and energetic in going out to search for it and bring it back. Jesus, with special reference to his own work in hunting up the lost sheep of the house of Israel, beautifully illustrates this duty by a parable. He says to those who condemned him for

receiving sinners, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep. If he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine, and go after that which is lost till he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing; and when he cometh home he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance." What can be the meaning of this parable, unless it be that when a disciple strays away from the path of duty, the very first obligation of the shepherd, rising above all the obligations at that moment due to the faithful brethren is to go and hunt up, and try to win back, the wanderer? He is to leave the ninety and nine, even in the wilderness, and go. If a congregation were assembled on the Lord's day for worship, and the Elders, upon looking over their faces, were to miss one, and ascertain that he was absent in some gay company, or at home in an ill humor, or about to start out for the day on a pleasure excursion, would they be pressing the teaching of this parable too far, should one of them immediately leave the house of God, and go to bring in that person? How much joy it would create among the saints on earth, and among the angels in heaven, if such a thing were done successfully and often! Should any one, however, be unwilling to press the analogy to this extent, he must still admit that the nearest possible approach to this degree of vigilance can alone meet fully the demands of the shepherd's duty.

Such reflections make it very painful to look abroad at the well known condition of many congregations—the sheep scattered far and wide through the wilderness, and the shepherds eating and drinking, or asleep on the ground. Oh, that we had some Jeremiah to lift up his voice against the unfaithful shepherds of the flock of God!

If such vigilance as we have named is needed in hunting up those who wander away, how much more is needed to *prevent* such wandering? The good Shepherd will endeavor to have as little of the former work to do as possible, by doing more of the latter. When the disposition of wander is discovered, he will be prompt to counteract it. All this requires constant watchfulness and inquiry on the part of each Elder, and very frequent consultations of the board of Elders. We will speak of the latter more fully at another time.

*Secondly.* We have already spoken sufficiently for the purposes of this treatise, on the second class of the shepherd's duties. To lead the flock whither they should go, by going before, and calling them to follow, is simply to be an example to the flock, as we have stated and endeavored to enforce in a former section.

*Thirdly.* The duty of protecting the church against foes both from within and from without, is not only implied in the title of shepherd, but specifically enjoined by Paul in a passage already cited more than once. He warns the Ephesian Elders that ravenous wolves would come in among them, not sparing

the flock; and that schismatics would spring up within, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them; and says to them, "Therefore watch." They must watch, then, against these two dangers, and this makes the Elders the proper guardians of the church against false teachers and schismatics.

In order to discharge faithfully this duty, they must scrupulously avoid any action on their own part which would unnecessarily excite faction in the church, and when they find any man showing the slightest disposition to be a factionist, they must bring to bear upon him promptly every good influence which can be devised to prevent the anticipated evil. They must also know every man whom they invite or allow to address the brethren at their stated meetings. They must deny this privilege to every stranger who comes among them unrecommended, and every man whom they know to be a promoter of dissension and a teacher of false doctrine. A very small wolf in sheep's clothing can scatter a large flock of sheep, and a very feeble man in the shape of a Soul-sleeper or Universalist can sometimes disaffect and ruin many souls; and a man who teaches nothing false, but aims at strife and division can often do more harm than a false teacher. With a firmness, then, that knows no yielding, but with a caution and prudence which guards against unjust judgment, must the shepherd watch the door which opens into their folds.

## 7. HOW TO BE OVERSEERS

The term overseer is more generic, as an official title, than the term shepherd, because the duties of a secular overseer are more numerous than those of a shepherd. The overseer of a farm, of a factory, of a city, of any company of men, takes cognizance of all that concerns the business of the men who are under his oversight. All that concerns the church, therefore, as a body of disciples, must be under the care of the overseers thereof, unless we find some limitations assigned in the word of God. If we attempt, however, to discriminate between those duties which belong to overseers and those which belong to the same men in the capacity of shepherds, we may separate in thought the latter from the former. Omitting from our present view, therefore, all that we have included in the title shepherd, and reserving for its proper place all that is included in the work of teaching, we will attempt to classify and consider briefly those duties which remain to the elders as overseers.

When a church acts as a body, it must usually do so through its proper organs. There are very few acts of the church which are or can be performed by the simultaneous and equal action of all the members. If they pray, one leads and the others unite silently in the petitions: if they sing, one leads and the others sing in unison with him; if they break the loaf, one returns thanks, others pass the loaf around, and all partake; if they feed the poor, all contribute and a few

distribute; if they speak as a body to other churches or to the world, they speak through a spokesman. In all cases of church action, in which the church as a whole can not act, it is a necessity that she act through her proper officers; and from this it follows, that the overseers of the church must take the lead in all actions of this kind, which are not exclusively assigned to some other officers. Among these duties we find the following:

First, it is enjoined upon the church, "Let all things be done decently and in order." [1 Cor. 14:40](#), This injunction necessarily requires each member to act decently and orderly the part which is assigned to him; but in order that each may do so it is, necessary that some one shall assign each his proper part, and exercise such superintendence as will insure the order required. Moreover, it is requisite that some one shall decide, where the apostles have not prescribed some order, what order shall be observed, and what shall constitute the decency of its observance. Undoubtedly the congregation itself is, from the nature of the case, the chief authority in these matters; but the congregation must have a mouth piece by which to speak, and an arm by which to execute; and seeing that there are overseers of the church, this labor most naturally devolves on them. To preserve, therefore, such order in the church as the apostles have prescribed, or such as the church may have agreed upon, and to secure the utmost attainable decorum in all the public procedure of the church, is one way in which to act as an overseer.



Second, and near akin to the above, it is commanded in reference to the public worship, "Let all things be done to edifying." [1 Cor. 14:26](#). For the same reasons as in the former case, it must devolve on the overseers to secure the practical observance of this precept. Of course they can not secure it without a proper regard for the precept on the part of the congregation; but even when each one desires that what is done shall be edifying, the end is not always attainable without the guidance and direction of some one possessing superior judgment, and to whom, by common consent, the general control of the public exercises shall be committed. The overseers, then, by force of their office, must see to it that what is done in the house of worship, including the singing, the teaching, the tongues, the revelations and the interpretations, (the apostle enumerates all these) shall be so executed as to edify the body. This requires the utmost good judgment on their part, as to what will edify, and the utmost delicacy in advising the participants, in the various acts of worship, so as to secure the desired compliance.

In the third place, the church is required to withdraw from those who walk disorderly. [2 Thes. iii: 6](#). In this act of withdrawal, and in the steps which must be taken antecedent to it, the overseers or rulers must take the leading part. When a brother trespasses against another, and the private steps have been taken which the Savior prescribes, the matter is to be told to the church, the church is to speak, and if the offender hear not the church, he is to be treated as a heathen

and a publican. [Matt. xviii: 15-17](#). Now, the church may hear accusations as a body, or hear them, through her appointed overseers; but when she undertakes to persuade and warn and entreat the accused, she is confined to the latter medium, and for the sake of decency and order, she has found it necessary also to hear accusations only through the same medium. To the overseer, then, as the proper organ through which the church take action in the case, must all accusations be presented.

Again, while it is the duty of the elders in their capacity as shepherds, to seek all the straying members, and to bring them back, if possible, to their duty, they must necessarily sometimes fail in this effort, and then begins their work as overseers. The wanderer is found incorrigible, and is walking disorderly, notwithstanding all proper efforts to bring him to repentance. The church must now withdraw from him as from those who will not hear the church; and upon the overseers devolves the duty of seeing that this withdrawal takes place.

Let it be observed here, that the duty of withdrawing from the disorderly is enjoined, not upon the overseers, but upon the church at large, and the overseers become connected with it, as leading actors, only by virtue of their official relation to the church. It is an act in which the whole church can participate, but in which they must have an arm and a mouthpiece. That the mass of the church did participate in the apostolic age, is evident from the directions given to the

church in Corinth about withdrawing from the incestuous man. Paul says, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, 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." [1 Cor. v: 3-5](#). In this case the punishment was inflicted by the majority ([2 Cor. ii: 6](#)), a minority no doubt refusing, under the influence of Paul's enemies, to obey the commandment of the apostle. The facts, however, demonstrate that the whole church should, in cases of exclusion, be assembled together, and in some decent and orderly manner, deliver the offender over to Satan.

## 8. HOW TO WITHDRAW THE DISORDERLY

We have reached the conclusion, that in the act of withdrawing from a disorderly member, both the Eldership and the congregation as a body should take part. We now inquire what particular part each should take. We here raise three questions which cover the whole ground of inquiry: 1. Who is to judge of the facts? 2. Who is to judge of the law in the case? 3. Who is to execute the sentence of the law?

Neither of these questions is formally raised by any New Testament writer, but enough is left on record, we think, to determine what was the practice of the primitive churches, and the will of the inspired apostles. The elders are styled the shepherds, the overseers, and the rulers of the church, and these titles necessarily imply that they are the constituted judges of the conduct of members. The shepherd must of necessity take knowledge of the conduct of his flock, and be better qualified to judge of it, if fit to be a shepherd, than any or all of the flock. The overseer, by the very nature of his office and work, is a judge of the facts in the conduct of those under his oversight. And the ruler, who, as in this case, has no legislative authority, and only a concurrent executive authority, must be a ruler chiefly in the judicial sense of the term. Add to these considerations of the fact of the utter incapacity of a mixed assembly of men, women and children, to decide upon facts in many cases of church discipline, and

we are forced to the conclusion that the Elders are the judges of the facts in every case.

The correctness of this conclusion is confirmed by experience. Where cases of discipline have been examined in the presence of the whole assembly, and after testimony presented, all have been called upon to vote upon the questions at issue, confusion, strife and shame have commonly been the result, while the ends of justice have seldom been satisfactorily attained. There is no wise man, therefore, who would not greatly prefer, as judges of any question affecting his reputation, a small number of men well chosen for the purpose, to a miscellaneous gathering of the people. The wisdom and experience of the world is in perfect accord with the wisdom of God, in deciding that chosen rulers shall be the judges of all infractions of law.

But who shall decide what the law of God is in any given case? The apostles have answered this question by constituting the Elders the teachers of the church. They are teachers of the law of God, and the church members are their pupils. The very nature of this relation implies that the teachers shall point out to the taught what the will of Christ is in every circumstance of life, and especially, that when a law is violated, both the violated precept and the penalty attached shall be pointed out by them. The Elders then in their capacity as teachers, are judges of the law in every case of disorderly conduct, and it is their duty to point out the law very plainly

both to the offender and to the congregation to the offender while laboring to reclaim him; to the congregation while preparing them to withdraw their fellowship from the irreclaimable.

We are now to suppose that an individual has been found guilty of disorderly conduct, and that he persists in it to such a degree as to render a withdrawal from him necessary. The church as a body, as we have seen, must act in the withdrawal, under the guidance of its eldership. What are the exact steps which shall be taken? Here the Scriptures are silent, and, therefore, each church is left to its own discretion in the premises, when the Scriptures require something to be done, and prescribe no method of doing it, that method which is found to be most expedient is the one which should be adopted. This is the true province of expediency.

Now, the end to be attained, in the case under consideration, is the united action of the elders and the disciples in withdrawing from one who has been found worthy of exclusion from the church. Any method of procedure which secures harmony and concert of action in the case must be pronounced good. The method which has been adopted in many well regulated churches, and which I regard as the best, is the following:

The facts of the case, and the evidence upon which they have been ascertained, are reported by one of the elders in the name of all. The law of Christ which is violated is pointed

out, and the duty of withdrawing from persons who persistently violate this law, is, made plain. It is then asked, if there is any reason known to any person why the church should not immediately withdraw from the offender. A pause is made to allow any one to speak who knows or thinks he knows such reason. If any one claims to have such reason, the case is immediately postponed until the reason can be heard and duly considered, by the Eldership, they being the judges of its relevancy and sufficiency. If no such reason is offered, or if, having been offered and duly considered, it is insufficient, the whole congregation are called upon to arise to their feet and unite in the act of withdrawal. If a majority of them do so, the officiating Elders pronounces some such words as the following:

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we do now solemnly withdraw the fellowship of this congregation from -----, and do humbly beseech Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, to have mercy upon him, that he may be brought to repentance, and that his soul may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Amen."

We say that the sentence should be pronounced, provided a majority of those assembled shall take part in it, because it can not properly be regarded as the act of the church if the majority refuse to take part. Such refusal, however, must necessarily be of rare occurrence where the Eldership possess even a small amount of that wisdom and discretion

which should characterize them. In almost all conceivable cases, such an Eldership will know beforehand the sentiments of the congregation, and will either postpone the presentation of the case until they can instruct the disciples more fully upon the subject involved, or they will conclude, from the predominance in the church of an adverse judgment, that their own decision is of doubtful propriety, and that action should therefore be indefinitely postponed. Such a thing as a rupture between the church and the Eldership is, therefore, almost an impossibility, except where the Elders are so incompetent as to deserve rebuke or defeat, or the members of the church so corrupt as to deserve abandonment by those among them who are true and faithful to the Lord.



## 9. HOW TO BE TEACHERS

The first prerequisite to teaching is the possession of knowledge. Unless a man knows something that his pupils do not, he can not be their teacher. In order to be teachers, therefore, the Elders must be diligent in the acquisition of Scripture knowledge, and must be at all times better informed in the word of God than the chief part of the congregation. We say the chief part of the congregation, because it is quite possible that a congregation may contain individuals better acquainted with the Scriptures than the Elders, even though the latter be well qualified teachers.

The work of teaching the practical duties of the Christian life, necessarily implies the exposure and rebuke of such practices and teaching as are inconsistent with these duties. Consequently, Paul says that Elders should be able both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. [Ti. i: 9](#). *Gainsayers* are those who *speak against* what is taught. They are supposed to be actuated by some improper desire in their gainsaying, and are to be exhorted to abandon their course. After exhortation fails, they are not necessarily to be *convinced*, as the common version reads, but to be *convicted*; that is, convicted of wrong. To convince a gainsayer might be an impossibility, and, therefore, too much to require of an Elder; but to convict one before the people is a very different and far easier task. This direction of the apostle evinces an expectation, that men would be found in the churches who

would speak against the practical teaching of the Elders, and need to be exhorted and convicted. No Eldership of much experience has failed to meet with such characters. They are found especially among the apologists for various kinds of popular vices which are respectable in the eyes of the world, and in which worldly minded disciples are constantly tempted to participate.

In what way the public teaching of the Eldership, as regards the mode of conducting it, can be made most effective, is an inquiry of immense interest to the churches of this generation. Various methods, meeting with various degrees of success, are now in active use. In some instances, the Eldership make no attempt whatever at public teaching, and very little at private teaching. This is an intolerable neglect of duty, for which the delinquents must eventually be called to a terrible account. If the neglect results from indifference, it is a great sin; if from incapacity, a resignation of the office should immediately take place. In other instances, an evangelist is employed to teach and preach on certain Lord's days in each month, and the remainder of the Lord's day meetings are devoted to the teaching of the Elders, who imitate as nearly as possible the matter and manner of the evangelist. In others, all the instruction on Lord's day is given by an evangelist, and a special meeting is held within the week for mutual edification and attendance to public discipline, in which the Elders are the chief speakers. In others, one of the Elders, distinguished by his superior ability

to teach and preach, occupied the stand on Lord's day, and the other Elders take part in the more private meetings during the week. In still other instances, especially among the churches of Great Britain and Australia, the principal meeting on Lord's day is devoted to instruction by the Elders, and to mutual exhortation by members under the direction of the Elders, while the evangelist preaches at other hours on Lord's day, and on some night within the week.

If we estimate the results of these methods, we must confess that hitherto they have proved quite meagre. The efforts of the majority of our Elders are so little instructive and edifying, that not even the members of the church will attend, in good numbers, when it is expected that one of them will occupy the hour. Hence, there is constant complaint that the members will not come out to church except when the preacher is present. Again, the efforts of a large number of our evangelists, even of those with much experience, are quite ineffective, as regards the instruction of brethren in the Christian life, and the awakening of zeal and conscientiousness. Indeed, it is a rare thing to find a preacher, who is capable of speaking to edification in the same congregation for a series of years. This accounts, in a great measure, for the frequent removals of preachers from place to place. A congregation will rarely consent to the loss of a preacher who uniformly instructs and edifies them in public, and whose deportment is at all reputable.

If we turn from the work of public, to that of private teaching, we find the results still more unsatisfactory. In the great mass of our congregations there is an almost entire absence of private instruction by the Elders, or even by the evangelist, so that members of the church have to depend upon their own reading, and the weekly or monthly sermon, for all they know of truth and duty. Thanks to the activity and cheapness of the religious press, the ignorance thus resulting is not so great as it might be, but among those disciples who are too little educated to learn rapidly from print and preaching and those who are too much absorbed in other matters to read the Bible much, or to listen thoughtfully to preaching, there is a woeful ignorance in reference to some of the simplest principles of piety and morality.

## 10. PRIMITIVE MODE OF TEACHING

We have not as much information in the Scriptures upon the primitive mode of conducting the public services of the church, as we might expect to find. Still, we have some, and it becomes us to make the most careful use of it and learn from it all we can.

In the [fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians](#), Paul gives the church directions upon this subject, and concludes by remarking that "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the congregations of the saints." [Verse 33](#). This remark, in the connection which it sustains, requires the supposition that the same mode of avoiding confusion and securing peace which he had just prescribed for the Corinthians, was the mode established in all the congregations. This conclusion is confirmed by the consideration, that the apostle could not be supposed to establish, in different congregations, methods in any great degree different from each other.

After having stated the threefold object of prophesying, that it contemplates edification, exhortation and comfort; and having pointed out the impropriety of speaking in tongues unless an interpreter were present, the apostle proceeds as follows: "How is it, then, brethren? When you come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be

done to edifying." The expression "every one" is not to be taken strictly; for it is not true that every member had each one of the exercises enumerated; but the apostle means that they have these among them; some one; some another. Singing, then, in which some were specially gifted; teaching, in which others excelled, and which is here used as the equivalent of prophesying; speaking in tongues which belonged to still another class; and interpreting tongues, which belonged to still another, constituted the exercises under consideration. Having thus stated the different exercises, the apostle drops the subject of singing, and proceeds to give the proper mode of conducting the public speaking both by tongues and by prophesying. He says, "If any man speak in a tongue, let it be by two, or at most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church." The meaning of the expression "by two or at most by three," is, that two or at most three persons shall speak at one meeting. So say the commentators, and so the context requires us to understand the expression. Two or at most three brethren, then, possessed of the gift of tongues, might speak at one meeting, provided an interpreter were present; otherwise, they were forbidden to speak at all in the assembly of the saints.

Advancing, now to the other class of speakers, he gives the same direction as to number; saying, "Let the prophets speak, two or three, and let the others judge. If anything be revealed to another who sits by, let the first hold his peace;

for you may all prophesy, one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted."

From this it appears, that, as in the case of the tongues, only two or three prophets were to speak at a single meeting and that no one was to occupy the time to the exclusion of another who wished to speak. While one was speaking, and had occupied sufficient time, the Spirit would move another to speak, and upon his making this known, the first must hold his peace. It appears, also, that liberty to speak in rotation was extended to all those who possessed the prophetic gift. The expression, "you may all prophesy, one by one," means, not all the members, but all the prophets; for only a part of the members possessed the gift of prophecy. The judging mentioned is doubtless that by which the prophets, who were listening, decided as to the reality of the inspiration claimed by him who was speaking.

From these directions, we determine the order of exercises in the primitive churches as follows: When brethren were present who could speak in tongues, two or three of them would speak, each following by his interpreter; and after or before these, or perhaps intermingled with these, two or three prophets would speak, thus making from four to six speeches at one meeting. Singing was also introduced in such amount and at such time as would best promote edification, and the Lord's supper, together with suitable prayers, found an appropriate place amid other exercises. We need not pause

to furnish the intelligent reader with proof as to the services last mentioned.

So great a variety of exercises at a single meeting imposes the alternative of protracting the meeting to great length, or of greatly abbreviating each exercise. But long continued meetings have never, in any age, been found profitable, and therefore, the strong probability is that the individual exercises were very brief. If each one of the six speeches occupied ten minutes, and the various services connected with the Lord's supper half an hour, these, together with singing and prayers, would doubtless protract the entire services to two hours, as much time probably, as they usually occupied.

In the primitive churches, very generally, if not universally, the teachers possessed some spiritual lift imparted by imposition of apostolic hands. It is for this reason that the directions which we have on record are given with reference to the exercise of such gifts. But when these gifts passed away, here is no doubt that the order of exercises instituted for the inspired was perpetuated by the uninspired teachers. The former would naturally be the mode, for the latter; and the latter would argue at if it were necessary for inspired teachers to follow the directions of the apostle, much more would be necessary for the uninspired to do the same. A perpetuation of this mode of conducting the worship, was,



therefore, a necessity, so long as men continued to be governed by apostolic precedents.

Although the above was the order prevalent in the primitive churches, we have evidence that it was sometimes interrupted. When Paul met with the brethren at Troas, he occupied the whole time of their meeting with his long speech and subsequent conversation. This shows that when opportunity occurred for greater instruction or edification than the ordinary exercises afforded, the rule of doing the greatest good to the greatest number prevailed, and this might justify the appropriation of the most favorable hour in the week to the labors of an evangelist.

The wisdom of this apostolic method of imparting public instruction to the disciples, is attested by the experiences of the present time. It is almost universally conceded by those who have opportunity to judge, that well conducted prayer meetings, in which brief alternate songs, prayers and exhortations fill up the time, are more edifying than most meetings for preaching; and when a large number of preachers are convened on some great occasion, it is found that meetings for social exercises of this character are more devotional than those in which the most eloquent speakers occupy the entire hour. Why, then, should not the churches, under the guidance of their Elders, depend more upon such meetings, and less upon preaching? That they do not, is a manifest departure from apostolic precedents, and like all

departures from the original standard, it brings forth evil fruit. Churches which can not be supplied with preaching, are languishing and dying, when, by this method, they might be full of life and power. Churches are far more numerous than men who can speak an hour to edification, and they will always be so in a religious body which is rapidly increasing. If you try to check this disparity by ceasing to multiply churches, the zeal of the body will die, and it will cease to multiply preachers also. Our only alternative, therefore, is to return to primitive practice. Let the Elders, in the absence of the evangelist, assemble the congregation every Lord's day, and instead of allowing one or two to occupy the time, call forth from four to six with other established exercises of the Lord's house. There are many other considerations in favor of this method, but I will not pause to enumerate them.

# 11. QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE OFFICE

The qualifications for the office of an Elder are all prescribed by the Apostle Paul in the [third chapter of 1st Timothy](#) and the [first chapter of Titus](#). They are distributable into six natural divisions, and it will simplify our investigation to examine these divisions separately. They are distinguished as they relate respectively to experience, reputation, domestic relations, character, habits, and ability to teach and rule. We will consider them in this order.

1. *Experience*. We mean by this, experience in the life of a Christian. Paul says that an Elder should not be a new convert, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. [1 Ti. 3:6](#). The reason here given shows that the office was one of high honor and responsibility; otherwise, the occupant of it would incur no danger of being lifted up with pride. The condemnation of the devil is the condemnation into which the devil fell, which, according to Paul's understanding of it, resulted from pride. A new convert would be more likely to fall into this sin than an experienced Christian, because he would more recently have escaped the habitual service of Satan, and would have had power to resist temptation. In assigning this qualification, the apostle shows how important it is that *pride of office* shall not characterize the Eldership. It is the same important lesson that Jesus taught the disciples when he said, "He that would be greatest among you, let him be servant of all."

Within what period after his immersion a man ceases to be a new convert, is not here indicated. It is left to the decision of those interested in the selection and ordination of Elders. It is not at all difficult for men of common sense to decide what members of a given church are new converts, although it would be difficult to express the idea more definitely than it is done by the apostle.

2. *Reputation.* The good which a church is capable of accomplishing in a community depends very much upon its reputation, and the reputation of the church depends much upon that of its representative men. Most wisely, therefore, it is required that an Elder shall have a "good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." [1. Ti. iii: 7](#). If he fall into reproach, not only is the church reproached with him, but he must soon lose his influence over the membership of the church, and it is difficult for the devil to construct a snare more likely to catch his victim than when he brings an Elder into reproach within the church. Both the Elder himself and many members of his flock are exposed to almost certain ruin in that event. Many brethren can be found who have been caught in this snare, and who are now either standing aloof from the church, or coldly and sourly looking on and criticising those who do the work which they once failed to do.

This qualification has a necessary limitation. When they that are without are men who despise what is good, and hold

in bad repute the man who acts according to the will of Christ, we can not understand the apostle to mean that the Elder shall have a good report from them; nor, indeed, does he refer to men of that character, whether many or few in the community. He refers to men whose opinion is worth considering, and who know the habits of the Elder. He must have a good report from them in regard to his moral and religious character.

It is seldom, according to our observation, that a church has been so thoughtless as to select a man for the Elder's office who was very deficient in this qualification, but 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 the 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. A conference of a large number of the more intelligent and disinterested members, conducted in the most private manner possible, and its decision communicated in the most considerate manner, will always

effect the object with a man whose feelings are at all delicate. If, in any case, this should fail, more open and public means should be resorted to; for an Elder must have a good report from them that are without, and upon the church rests the responsibility of seeing that no man is retained in the office who does not possess this qualification.

3. *Domestic relations.* To Timothy and Titus both, the apostle prescribes that the overseer shall be the husband of one wife. There has been a vast amount of disputation as to whether this requires him to be a married man. It is alleged, in opposition to this idea, that when churches were planted among a people practicing polygamy, men would frequently be immersed who had a plurality of wives, and that the apostle intends only to prohibit such from being made overseers. Undoubtedly the use of the numeral one in the text has this force, and it would be unlawful to place a polygamist or bigamist in the office. But while the expression has this force, we think that candor requires the admission that it also has the effect of requiring a man to be a married man. That he should be the husband of one wife, forbids having less than one as clearly as it forbids having more than one. If it be said that a man owns but one farm, it is just as clearly implied that he owns one as that he owns no more than one. Moreover, the context confirms the conclusion; for the apostle proceeds in both epistles to state how the overseer must govern his household, and especially his children; which statements imply that he is to be a man of family.

It has been urged as an objection to this conclusion, that it would disqualify Paul himself, and Barnabas and Timothy for the office of Elder although they held offices or positions of much greater responsibility. But this objection can have no force, unless it be made to appear that these brethren were qualified for the Elder's office, or that the qualifications of an Apostle or an Evangelist include those of an Elder. Neither of the two, however, can be made to appear, and therefore the objection has no force whatever. Indeed, it seems most fitting that men whose chief work led them from city to city and nation to nation, through all kinds of danger and hardship, should be freed from the care of a family, and equally fitting that the shepherd, whose work was always at home and in the midst of the families of his flock, should be a man of family. A married man certainly possess advantages for such work that are impossible to an unmarried man, and the experience of the world must confirm the wisdom of the requirement that the overseer shall be the husband of one wife. It may be well to add that one living wife is clearly meant, and that there is no allusion to the number of deceased wives a man may have had. If my wife is dead, I am not now her husband.

It is also required that the candidate for the Eldership shall "rule well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;" or, as it is expressed in Titus, "having faithful children not accused of riot, or unruly." The reason given for this requirement is this: "For if a man know not how to rule his

own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" The figure of interrogation is here employed in order to assert, most emphatically, that if a man does not know how to rule his own house, he can not take care of the Church of God—he is incompetent to fill the office of overseer. It is altogether vain for uninspired men to demur against a decision so emphatically rendered by an apostle; we therefore accept it without qualification.

4. *Character.* The traits of character prescribed for an Elder are numerous, and when considered as a whole they present a very rare combination. The first of these in logical order, and the first mentioned in both of the epistles which treat of the subject, is *blamelessness*. When it is said that an overseer must be *blameless*, we must of necessity understand the term in a comparative, not in an absolute sense. This necessity arises from the fact acknowledged and insisted upon by the apostles, that no man is entirely blameless when his character stands a fair comparison with the characters of other good men. The apostle seems, to have his eye upon the counterpart of the good reputation which we have already mentioned. If a man possessing a good repute among them who are without, is known to have a character corresponding to this, he is blameless in the only sense in which men in the flesh can be blameless. We may remark further, that this qualification, from the very fact of its being comparative, must admit of different degrees, and that some qualified Elders may be more blameless than others. The



degree which is requisite to eligibility in any given case, must be determined by those who are immediately concerned in the selection and ordination of the Elder.

To be blameless, is merely to be free from faults. Not content with this general prohibition, the apostle proceeds to specify some faults which it is especially important for the overseer to avoid. He must not be *covetous*. We have already spoken of the importance of this prohibition, while treating of the example which the Elders should set before their brethren. A covetous Eldership will make a covetous church, and a covetous church is a dead church.

As the Elder must not be covetous, so, according to the reading of our common version, he must not be "greedy of filthy lucre." The Greek adjective, of which this expression is the rendering, is *aischrokerdos*, compounded of *aischros*, *base*, and *kerdos*, *gain*. There is a slight difference of opinion as to its meaning. Some critics render it "*greedy of gain*," and some, "*making money by base means*." The latter understand the apostle as prohibiting any disreputable business; and the former, as prohibiting the greed for gain which would lead to such a business. By either rendering, a disreputable occupation is prohibited—such, for example, as dealing in intoxicating liquors, jockey trading, rearing sporting stock, renting property for improper uses, and such like, in none of which can a man engage unless his greed for gain overrides his regard for the welfare of the community. Any other course

of life by which a man betrays an excessive greed for gain is undoubtedly prohibited.

The apostle also specifies among prohibited faults, *self-will*. The Elder must not be *self-willed*. No man is fit to hold office jointly with other men, who is not content to often yield his own will to that of his compeers. Neither is any man capable of exercising moral sway over a community, who, possesses an iron will that never bends to the wishes of others. We speak now of matters which are lawfully subject to the will of man, not of those in which God's will has been declared. Within the limits of the latter there is no room for the human will to play--it has only to submit.

In the third place, the overseer is to avoid every thing which would disturb the peace of the church. He is not to be a "*striker*," nor a "*brawler*," nor even "*soon angry*," but in opposition to all these, he is to be "*temperate*" and "*patient*." He will have frequent occasions for the trial of his patience, if he makes vigorous efforts to discharge his duties; and unless he be well supplied with it, though he may not fall to brawling and striking, he will become ill-tempered and discouraged. Nothing is more wisely said, than that he must be patient.

Besides the negative qualifications, or traits of character which an overseer must not possess, the apostle names a number of *positive* elements of character. He must be "*just*," for he is a judicial functionary of the church; he must be "*sober*," that is sober minded, for *levity*, which sobriety

forbids, argues a want of piety; he must be a "*lover of hospitality*," for otherwise he is devoid of that sympathy which is necessary in order to secure the affection of others; he must be "*a lover of good men*," for all good men love one another; he must be "*holy*," for he is set apart to a holy office, and his official acts concern the most holy relations which bind mere to one another and to their God.

5. *Habits*. A man's habits grow out of his character, but they also react upon his character, tending constantly to make it either better or worse. A habit of vigilance, or watchfulness, is enjoined upon the Elder, because without it many things most deleterious to the congregation would escape his notice. A want of this habit is a very common fault. While the overseer should be far better informed as to the condition of the members of the church than any other person in it or outside of it, it is often the case that through mere want of watchfulness he is the last to learn what is going on. A habit of watchfulness in matters of business is apt to follow a man into the office of overseer; hence the importance of requiring it as a condition of eligibility.

It is not more important for the overseer to be watchful, than that he should avoid the only other habits mentioned by the apostle, and not implied in the qualifications already discussed. He must not be "given to much wine." It is not merely drunkenness that is here prohibited; if it was, we would doubtless have the word which is appropriated to the

expression of that idea. Neither is the idea of *much* in the original. The term is *paroinon, by wine*, and means simply, *given to wine*. It doubtless contemplates a man who is given to a freer use of wine than was customary among strictly sober people even though he might never become intoxicated.

We have now glanced rapidly at the rare combination of moral traits and habits which must characterize the overseer, and will next discuss the intellectual qualifications which are necessary to his usefulness as a teacher.

## 12. INTELLECTUAL QUALIFICATIONS

While the moral and religious traits of character requisite for the office of Elder are numerous, and some of them are demanded by the apostle with great emphasis, only one qualification of an intellectual character is mentioned, and this is expressed in general terms. This fact is significant, and admonishes us not to mis-adjust the divine balance, by making the most of what which is made the least of in the Scriptures.

This one intellectual qualification is represented in the [Epistle to Timothy](#) by the expression, "*apt to teach.*" The Greek for this expression is *didaktikos*, which I prefer to render "*capable of teaching.*" The Elder, then, must be capable of teaching; but this expression represents a variable quantity. One might be capable of teaching some persons, and utterly incapable of teaching others. It becomes a matter of necessity, then, that before we can form a judgment as to a man's possession of this qualification in the requisite degree, we must know who it is that he is to teach. A person capable of teaching children might be incapable of teaching adults, as one capable of teaching an academy might be incapable of teaching the classes in a college. So an Elder might be capable of teaching a congregation in one community, and not in another near by. What is the standard, then, by which each individual candidate for the Eldership is to be judged in this respect? Undoubtedly, it is to be found in

the attainments of the congregation which he is to teach. He is to be *their* teacher, and theirs alone; consequently, if he is capable of teaching them, he has the capability required by the Scriptures. From this it appears that properly qualified Elders may possess capability of teaching in as great variety of degrees as characterizes the intellectual and religious attainments of the various congregations. Furthermore, it must be evident that each individual congregation is the best judge of the capability of an Elder to be its teacher. So long as they receive instruction from the Elder, and are satisfied with him, he is qualified according to the Scriptures to teach that congregation, however much he may fall below some other Elder in some other congregation.

But this capability of teaching has a special direction given to it in the [epistle to Titus](#). It is there said that the Elder must "hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and to convict the gainsayers." Here, both the source of his information, and one of the specific objects of his teaching are mentioned. The specific object is to exhort and convict the gainsayer--exhort them till exhortation fails, and then convict them before the congregation as corrupt opposers of the truth. Of course, this is only one of the many objects of teaching, and is mentioned in this place because the young congregations in Crete were at that time infested by "vain talkers and deceivers." The source of information by which the Elders were to silence these men, was not the philosophy in which the latter

boasted, but the faithful word which had already been taught. The Elders are required to hold fast this "faithful word," and, as a consequence, condemn everything unauthorized by it. A "thus saith the Lord" was to be the touch stone of every doctrine and every practice which Jew or Gentile might introduce, and thus, by "*sound teaching*," the Elders were to stop the mouths of all in their respective congregations who taught things which they ought not.

It is an old question, as old, at least, as Presbyterianism, whether capability to teach must characterize every eligible candidate for the Eldership. The Presbyterian theory requires one teaching Elder and a plurality of ruling Elders in each congregation, and they claim that they find authority for this distinction in the well-known words of Paul: "The Elders who rule well count worthy of double honor, specially they who labor in word and teaching." After all that has been said and written on this passage, we think that candor most certainly requires the admission that there were some Elders who did not labor in word and teaching. Every attempt which we have ever seen to set aside this obvious inference from the words, is a mere subterfuge like those so often adopted to obscure the plain statements of the Scriptures in reference to baptism. Let us deal fairly with our own minds, and the Scriptures will more readily yield to us their meaning.

But while we are thus compelled, by the obvious meaning of plain words, to admit that there were Elders in the primitive

churches who did not labor in word and teaching--that is, who did not preach and teach publicly, we are by no means compelled to admit that it was because they were *incapable* of teaching. Capability of teaching being a prescribed qualification for the Eldership, we may not suppose that it was disregarded in the selection of Elders, unless it be in uninstructed congregations. But Paul does not mention the "Elders that rule well" in a manner to indicate that their appointment was irregular. There is another way to account for the distinction made without supposing a violation of the law; and that is, that although all of the Elders were capable of teaching, some were more capable than others, and the burden of this part of the work was for this reason assigned to them by mutual consent. Where a number of men are associated together in an office of multifarious duties, it is almost invariably the case that some are better adapted for one duty, and others for another; and in order to the greatest efficiency of the body they must of necessity adopt a corresponding division of labor. It is natural, therefore, if not unavoidable, that in the practical working of a board of Elders, some of them should do little else than rule, and others little else than teach and preach. Jointly, they are responsible for the teaching and ruling; among themselves they must divide the labor in such way as will accomplish the best results. The best rule that they can jointly exercise, and the best instruction that they can jointly impart, is what the Lord requires at their hands.



Some of the Christian congregations of the present day are at work on the plan here indicated. They have a board of Elders, all of whom are capable of teaching, and one of whom is a preacher. The latter proclaims the gospel to the world in the public assembly, and takes the leading part in the instruction of the congregation. He gives his whole time to the work, and lived of the gospel which he preaches. The others take a secondary part in the teaching, and share in full the responsibility of ruling. They give but a portion of their time to the work, and give it, like the Elders of the church at Ephesus, gratuitously. [Acts xx: 34, 35](#). This is Scriptural and wise.

In a still larger number of congregations, an Evangelist is called to the aid of the Eldership. He preaches and takes the leading part in teaching, while the Elders take the secondary part in teaching, and supreme control in ruling, making use, however, of whatever wisdom and experience the evangelist may possess, to aid them. This we also pronounce Scriptural; for in this capacity Timothy labored among the Elders at Ephesus, and Epaphroditus among those at Philippi. [Acts xx: 17, comp. 1 Ti. i: 3; Phil. i: 1, comp. ii: 25-30](#).

But, besides these, we must acknowledge that there are many congregations among us with Elders in office who do not teach, and who are incapable of teaching. All such should immediately do one of two things--either resign the office, or put into exercise their latent powers, and prove themselves capable of teaching and therefore qualified for the office.

However, all the congregations should be taught, by the Evangelists who form them to select for the office only men who are capable of teaching, and all Evangelists should be careful to ordain only such to the office. In this way present evils may gradually be corrected, and a repetition of them in the future, avoided.

## 13. PLURALITY OF ELDERS

There is no proposition in reference to the organization of the primitive churches upon which scholars and critics are more perfectly agreed than that every fully organized church had a plurality of Elders. So nearly universal is this agreement that a man betrays an ill-balanced judgment or a want of common information, if he denies the proposition. Such an agreement could not well exist without a foundation in statements of Scripture so unambiguous as to leave no room for doubt. We will notice a few of these.

In the first place, after Paul and Barnabas had passed through Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, and established a church in each, they returned through the same cities, and Luke says: "When they ordained them Elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." [Acts xiv: 23](#). From this it appears that they ordained Elders in every church which they planted on this tour. We find also that the church at Ephesus had a plurality of Elders, also called overseers; [Acts xx: 17-28](#); that the same was true of the church at Philippi, [Phil. i: 1](#); and that Titus was left at Crete to ordain Elders in *every city*, which is equivalent to ordaining them in every church, because there was but one church in each city.

We are now aware that efforts have been made at times, by eccentric writers to throw doubt upon these statements. It

has been assumed that there were a plurality of congregations in Ephesus, Philippi and the cities of Crete, and that the single Elders of these separate congregations made up the plurality. But this assumption is totally without foundation in the Scriptures, and is in direct conflict with the earliest uninspired history which represents but one organized body of believers as existing in one city. It is true that in these cities the disciples often had several meeting places, but there is no evidence of separate and independent organizations. The assumption in question also conflicts with the positive declaration that Paul and Barnabas ordained *Elders in every church*. What they did in one district they did in all; for they had but one gospel to preach, and but one system of government and order to establish throughout the earthly kingdom of God.

There is abundant evidence that this plurality of Elders in each congregation continued after the close of the Apostolic history, and that it existed in some churches of whose organization nothing is specially said in the Scriptures. For example, there is nothing said in the New Testament of the Eldership in Corinth, yet the epistle of the church in Rome to the church in Corinth commonly called the epistle of Clement, written about the close of the first century, proves that there was a plurality of Elders in Corinth. The writer says to the Corinthians "It is a shame, and unworthy of your Christian profession to hear that the most firm and ancient church of the Corinthians should, by one or two persons, be led into a

sedition against its Elders." The epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, written in the early part of the second century, shows that the Eldership continued in Philippi as Paul left it, and that there was a similar Eldership in Smyrna, whence the epistle was written; for Polycarp writes in the name of himself and "the Elders that are with him," and gives advice to the Elders in Philippi as to the discharge of their official duties. He says, "Let the Elders be compassionate and merciful toward all, turning them from their errors, seeking out those that are weak, not forgetting the widows, the fatherless and the poor, but always providing what is good both in the sight of God and man." But it is needless to multiply evidences of a fact which is already established to the satisfaction of candid minds. We proceed, therefore, to the consideration of another eccentric view of the same subject. It is sometimes argued that the plurality of Elders found in the primitive churches is to be accounted for by the fact that the gifts of the Spirit caused those churches to abound in men possessed of the proper qualifications; but that we should not expect modern churches, which are devoid of these gifts, to always possess a plurality of members thus qualified. It is therefore concluded that modern churches need not have a plurality of Elders.

Now, we freely admit that churches are found at the present day without a plurality of members qualified for the Eldership; and some, perhaps, without even a single member thus qualified. And we admit that such churches need not have a plurality of Elders or any Elders at all. Indeed,

they *must* have none until they can have more than one who is qualified. But this admission, which the nature of the case requires, by no means excuses any of the churches from establishing an order of church government entirely different from that established by the apostles; especially does it not excuse such churches as have the qualified members for neglecting to call them to the office.

The argument in question is also based upon premises unduly assumed. It is not true that gifts of the Holy Spirit qualified men for the Elder's office, except in the one matter of imparting to them the information necessary for teaching and government. They gave no men the moral, social and domestic qualifications which the apostle prescribes. Indeed, if miraculous gifts had supplied the requisite qualifications, there would have been no need of prescribing them so carefully; it would only have been necessary to say to Timothy and Titus, Ordain men who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is true that Paul and Barnabas found a plurality of qualified men in the churches of Asia Minor, in a comparatively short time after these churches had been planted, probably in from two to three years, four years being spent on their first missionary tour. But it must be remembered that in all the Jewish synagogues, which formed the starting point of Christian Churches, there were men already holding an office almost identical with that of the Christian Eldership, and that when these men came into the

church, as did Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth, they brought their qualifications and experience with them. Moreover, other aged, pious and experienced Jews who were not in office, were found competent to fill the office of Elders as soon as they received the gospel; and Gentiles, who, like Cornelius and the Centurion of Capernaum, had become devout worshipers of God through Jewish influence, were often possessed of all the qualifications for the office as soon as they were fairly established as members of the church. These facts are sufficient to account for the ordination of Elders in churches so newly planted, without supposing the imaginary fact that qualifications for the office were imparted by miraculous endowment. The intellectual qualifications, which alone were thus imparted, were then, and are now, the qualifications most easily found. I can go through the churches to-day and point you out two men, at a moderate estimate, with mind enough and speaking talent enough for the Eldership, where one can be found with the other prescribed qualifications.

We conclude, then, that in as much as the primitive churches, so many as had Elders at all, had a plurality of them, so it should be now; and that any church which departs from this rule, departs from the only model of church organization which God has given. Until a plurality of Elders could be ordained, the primitive churches did the best they could without Elders. So let it be now, and God will bless us in following the guidance of his word.

## 14. SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT

It has long been a question whether church officers should be selected by the congregation at large, or by the Evangelist charged with effecting the organization of the church. There is but little said on the subject in the Scriptures, but those who are willing to be guided by the slightest indications of the will of God in preference to their own judgment, will find sufficient to satisfy them.

We have only one example on record, in which we are distinctly told what part was taken by the congregation, and what by the ordaining officers. This is the case of the seven deacons of the church in Jerusalem. The Apostles called together "the multitude of the disciples," and said, "*Look you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business,*" [Acts vi: 2, 3](#). The *selection*, then, was made by the multitude, and the appointment by the apostles. The distinction made between these two terms should not be overlooked. The term appoint is sometimes understood as including the selection, but in the style of the apostles it means merely induction into office, and is distinguished from the selection which precedes it.

Now, in the case of the Elders in the churches of Lycaonia and Pisidia, it is said that Paul and Barnabas "ordained them"; or, to express it more accurately, "*appointed* them." [Acts xiv:](#)



[23](#). The word here rendered appoint (*cheirotoneo*) is not the one so rendered in [Acts vi: 3](#); but in such a connection its current meaning is about the same. The part performed by the apostles in this case being the same as in the case of the deacons, it is fair to presume that the part performed by the people was also the same, and that Luke fails to mention it because, having previously stated the process of selecting one class of church officers, he could presume that his readers would understand that the same process was observed in the present instance. Indeed, the nature of the case is such that we would of necessity so understand it, unless expressly informed that the process was different. If a traveler, giving an account of the customs of some newly discovered tribe of men, should describe the selection of a certain class of officers of their government, and afterward frequently speak of the selection of other classes of officers, without intimating that the process was different, it would necessarily be inferred that the process was the same, unless, indeed, there should be found something in the context, or in the nature of the case to forbid the inference.

When Titus is told to ordain or appoint Elders in every city, the same term is used, as when the apostles in Jerusalem proposed to appoint the deacons: the process, therefore, is the same, and it takes place after the selection of the officers by the people.

From these premises, we conclude that all church officers were selected by the congregation at large; and this conclusion is confirmed by the earliest uninspired history. Clement of Rome declares it a rule handed down from the apostles, that church officers "should be filled according to the judgment of approved men, with the consent of the whole community." This would indicate that the judgement of the most approved men in the congregation was given, perhaps in the way of nominations, and that the whole congregation was called upon to express their approval or disapproval. But whether nominations were made in the apostolic age can not be very certainly determined. The only certain fact is that the people elected their officers, and, therefore, whatever mode of procedure in conducting the elections seems most prudent to each individual church, is authorized by the Scriptures.

Next to the selection comes the appointment, or what is commonly called, the ordination of officers. The statements of the Scriptures on this subject are plain, and sufficiently minute. In the case of the deacons, having been chosen, we are told that they were set before the apostles, and, "when they had prayed, that laid their hands on them." They *proposed* to appoint them; what they did was to pray and lay hands on them; praying and laying on hands, then, was the mode of appointing, or, if you please, of ordaining. Fasting also is mentioned in connection with the ordination of the Elders in Lycaonia and Pisidia ([Acts xiv: 23](#)), and it is highly probable that it accompanied, or rather, preceded the service

on all such occasions. With these apostolic precedents before them, Titus in Crete, and Timothy in the province of Asia, needed no express instructions as to the process of ordination; neither does the Evangelist of the present day need any more than these precedents furnish. Fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands, conducted with due solemnity, and accompanied by appropriate admonitions and exhortations, constitute the Scriptural mode of induction into office.

Through a misconception of the design and effects of ordination, the superstitious idea has extensively prevailed, that if a man is once ordained to office in a congregation, he need not be re-ordained, if he changes his locality and is elected to the same office in another congregation, that there is something perpetual about the imposition of hands, which renders a repetition of it improper. This idea is precluded when we once understand that, like the oath of office in civil government, it is a mere induction into office and is therefore to be repeated as often as an election to office takes place.

There has been much useless discussion of the question, to what church officer pertains the privilege of laying on hands. The discussion is useless, because the Scriptures furnish unquestionable examples of hands being imposed by apostles, by prophets and by teachers, ([Acts xiii: 1-3](#)), by Elders; ([1 Ti. iv: 14](#)); and by Evangelists, ([1 Ti. v: 22](#); [Ti. i: 5](#)). At the present day, either Elders or Evangelists, or both together,

may perform the service, according to the dictates of good sense and the requirement of good order on each occasion.

One more question occurs to us as worthy of a brief notice in conclusion. Paul says of the deacons, "Let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." [1 Ti. iii: 10](#). Some understand this to mean that the candidate for the deacon's office shall be put to work in the duties of the office until it is ascertained whether he can perform them well or not, before he is ordained; and that the term *also* in the sentence refers back to the Elders previously mentioned, indicating the same in reference to them. It should be observed, however, that Paul does not say that the proving he speaks of is to precede *ordination*, but to precede *using the office*. It would be reversing Paul's order, therefore, to require the candidate to use the office as a means of proving him. Instead of proving him first, and then letting him use the office, it would be requiring him to use the office first of all. Evidently this can not be the meaning: but, having prescribed the qualifications by which a candidate for each of the offices in question is to be tested, the apostle states that they must prove themselves before they are allowed to exercise the functions of the office to which they aspire.

## 15. REGULAR MEETINGS

In a former section of this treatise, we mentioned the necessity of regular and frequent meetings of the Eldership of the church, in order to efficiency in the discharge of their duties. It is impossible that a work, requiring the united wisdom, watchfulness and activity, of a plurality of men, can be successfully accomplished without frequent, and often protracted consultations. The members of a business firm, even if they are engaged in a comparatively small business, find such consultations necessary; and the regularity with which the directors of banks, insurance companies, and corporations of like character, hold their meetings, is very well known. How, then, can it be expected that the Elders of a church, who have the interests of many precious souls under their care, will be able to dispense with such meetings? The thought is preposterous: and consequently, we find that in all churches which are characterized by faithful discipline, such meetings are regularly held. In many of our large city churches, the Elders find it necessary to meet at least once a week, and to often spend several hours together in consultation. It is probable that there is no Eldership, even in very small congregations, who would not find occasion for weekly meetings, if they were fully alive to all the duties of the office: but when less frequent meetings are found sufficient, let them, of course, be adopted.

In these meetings some regular mode of procedure should be adopted, by which all business should be attended to in order, and nothing neglected. Reports will be heard concerning efforts to reclaim the wandering and to check the wayward. Reports, also, of new cases which have arisen, demanding the attention of the Elders. Questions in reference to all the details of the church's work will be settled, and the details of labor distributed according to the ability and adaptedness of each Elder. And lest the combined watchfulness of all the official Board should have allowed some case of delinquency to escape notice, the names on the church book will be called over in regular rotation, and the spiritual condition of each member inquired into. By this means, the Elders will be constantly reminded of duties which might be forgotten, and constantly stimulated to the discharge of duties which might be neglected.

## 16. WANT OF TIME

There is no class of men who more universally and freely acknowledge a serious neglect of duty, than the Elders of churches. When we remember their position as leaders and exemplars of the disciples, we feel that this is a sad acknowledgment, and we can but mourn over its truthfulness. Who would not gladly furnish a remedy, if it were in his power?

The most common excuse for this neglect of duty is want of time. The Elder has not time to study the Scriptures, and prepare himself to speak to edification on the Lord's day; and he feels sure that he cannot take time to look promptly after persons needing his counsel or reproof. Under this conviction, he gives almost no time to his duties, until the church get into so miserable a condition as to alarm him into some activity, or until some very grievous and scandalous offence excites the whole community, and public clamor forces attention to the case of a man or woman who might have been saved from disgrace by timely admonition. Sometimes, indeed, this neglect of duty goes on until the Elder becomes perfectly disheartened and disgusted, throws up his office, indulges in bitter complaints, and finally loses all interest in the welfare of the church. The end of that man is the end of the unfaithful steward.

It will be found, upon careful calculation, that the excuse of a want of time is more imaginary than real. For example,

the average number of members in country and village churches is about one hundred and the average number of Elders about three. Suppose, now, that each of these three Elders should take sufficient time to see and converse with one person needing admonition or counsel, each week: we would have *one hundred and fifty-six* conversations in one year, more, perhaps, than the necessities of any ordinary congregation would require in order to a most effective state of discipline. And what Elder is there who can not, if he will, find time, by taking all advantage of incidental meetings, to hold at least one such conversation, on the average, for each week in the year? Surely it is no great sacrifice of time for even the most industrious business man among us. It requires nothing but the will to make it practicable and easy.

In the larger congregations, it is desirable to have one Elder wholly given to the work of overseeing, teaching and preaching: and we can easily imagine congregations, if we do not already have them among us, that need the labors of a plurality of such Elders. But even with the labors of one such man, to perform those parts of the duties of the office which require the larger amount of time, the difficulty in reference to time is largely obviated. In no instance, then, is this excuse a sufficient one to justify a tithing of the inefficiency which now so generally characterizes the disciplinary labors of the Eldership.



As regards preparation for public teaching, if our Elders would aim less at showy harangues upon the Lord's day, and more at plain and simple instruction on practical duties, and exhortations to the same, they would find that good preparation for the task would require no more Bible study than ought to characterize every good man, with the addition of such reflection upon Bible themes as would not more than prevent idle moments from running to waste. An economy of time, and a wisely directed use of it is what we need, rather than a greater amount of it.

Finally, the Elders of churches should constantly remember that they are divinely constituted exemplars to the flock, in all the virtues and activities of Christian life: and that one of the methods, and not the least of them, by which they should make their example felt, is to sacrifice some of their time to the service of the Lord. In so doing, they will obey the words of Paul, when he says to the Ephesian Elders, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." [Acts xx: 35](#).

I now bring this brief treatise to a close, and send it out among my brethren in the Elders office, as a token of my heartfelt interest in an office which has cost my own heart

more anxiety than all other duties which I have been called upon to perform in life. If it shall be of service to any of my fellow-laborers and companions, in tribulation, it will accomplish, to that extent, its mission.