



The Messenger



CHURCH OF CHRIST

Maple & Columbia
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No. 7

"IF A MAN DESIRE THE WORK OF A BISHOP"

For Self Or For God?

--W. R. Jones

"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." (I Timothy 3:1) In all likelihood the early Christians heard this "saying" often. Paul is affirming that the "saying" is not some human proverb, which might or might not be accurate, but is a "true saying." "Faithful is the saying" is thought by many scholars to be a better rendition. The word "saying" means doctrine, position, declaration, upon which one can fully rely.

The inspired writer then makes it clear that the "work" of a bishop is something that must be "desired." Some translators feel that "seeketh" is a better word. Both words indicate a burning desire to do a particular job. The word "desire" originally meant to stretch forth or reach after. It implies a strong eagerness, but not immoderate in character. Allow me to illustrate. A young man may have a "burning desire" to be a preacher. This is necessary for without it he will not succeed. It could be, however, that what he really wants is the honor and plaudit that comes from his hearers. In this case his desire is faulty. On the other hand his "burning desire" is to preach the Word to please God and save souls regardless of the consequences. His desire is now a very noble one and will serve him well in his great work of love. *Continued page two*

Bishop...from the front page.

Likewise, a man may "seek" to be a bishop because he considers it to be a position of power and prestige over others. His hunger is for the honor it may bring. This man's selfish ambition makes him a disgrace in God's eyes. He will accomplish no lasting good in the church of Christ. On the other hand a brother has a burning desire to be a bishop that he may do the "work" that God wants done. His thoughts are not centered on honor and prestige but saving souls, edifying saints, restoring the erring and rendering service to the praise and honor of God. Power and position are not a part of his thinking. He has no desire to make laws for all the laws have already been given by the one lawgiver, Jesus Christ. (James 4:12) He has no wish to be "a lord over God's heritage," but rather to be an "example to the flock." (I Peter 5:1-3) Instead of feeling elevated by the "office" he seeks, he is humbled by the "work" he is to do. Considering the importance of this great work, Paul later proceeds to give the qualifications of this office or work. It is of utmost importance that the man who desires this work have a clear view of what it is all about.

THE OFFICE OF A BISHOP

A bishop is a presbyter, an overseer, an elder in the church of Christ. The fundamental idea of the word "bishop" is "overseeing." I am told that the expression "The office of a bishop" is a single word in the Greek occurring four times in the New Testament. In (Luke 19:44) it is translated "visitation." It is rendered "bishopric" in (Acts 1:20) and "office of a bishop in (I Timothy 3:1) The verb form occurs two times; (Hebrews 12:15), "looking diligently" and (I Peter 5:2), "taking the oversight." The verb form means "to look upon, behold to inspect, to look after, see to, take care of." In (Acts 20:28) where Paul is giving advice to the elders at Ephesus the noun form is used. He refers to them as "overseers."

→ A man who wants to be an elder is described as "desiring a good work." Many things in life should not be desired, but this one should. The word "work" indicates that he is not to spend his life in ease and idleness, but to the accomplishing of the duties of his God given "office." Yet, let us remember, that this great "work" is predicated on a man being qualified. We are not to ordain men as elders and then get them qualified. Of course, they will continue to grow afterwards, but these qualification in Timothy and Titus are to be shown before appointment. A brother might have a great desire to serve as an elder but is lacking in qualifications. Another might have the qualifications but he has no desire to do the work. Neither will do. Desire and qualifications must go hand in hand. There is no greater work in the church than that of serving as an "elder." Brethren, if possible, make yourself useful for this great work. Work hard to make yourself "suitable" for the Master's use. Faithful elders in the Lord's church don't just happen! May God help us to find qualified men to lead us in the ways of righteousness.



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No. 8

"IF A MAN DESIRE THE WORK OF A BISHOP"

Do You Have Leadership?

--W. R. Jones

One question that is rarely asked in the selection of elders (bishops) is, do these men have any leadership? We generally place the emphasis on one being a good family man with a good reputation. That is fine, but leadership, which is needed to move God's people forward is grossly overlooked. Admittedly, the word "leadership" does not appear in the qualifications named in Timothy and Titus. However, if a man "ruleth well his house, convicts the gainsayer, refutes false doctrine, feeds the flock of God, tends the flock, sets a good example to the flock, takes heed unto himself and holds to the faithful word," **he must have leadership.** Let us ask, what kind of leadership are we talking about?

LEADERSHIP AS GOD SEES IT OR AS MAN SEES IT?

"Effective Leadership" as man sees it could mean that elders are good at inventing schemes, innovations, projects and even human organizations to advance the church. They might lead the church into a general liberal stance toward the Truth. This would fill the pews, but the church would become corrupted with worldliness and condemned. --Continued

CONTINUE from front page.

"Effective Leadership" as God sees it calls on His Divinely appointed leaders (elders) to carry out the duties which have been assigned to them in the New Testament. Remember, my brethren, this is a **"work"** to be done. It

→ is not the occupying of a position of prestige and power. It is a **"work"** of caring for and leading men in the ways of righteousness.

→ Some elders act like they own the church over which they serve. You may be sure, **they do not!** Men would be better elders if they would please remember what they are the head over. An elder is the head of his family, but he is not the head of the church. Christ is the head of the church and we had better leave it that way. Elders who assume that what they do is

→ not the business of the rest of the church are "Lording it over the flock." (1 Peter 5:3) Elders who limit their duties to providing body comforts for the flock and playing business managers have missed the Divine teaching on the "work" of elders. "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." This is a "good work" of "convicting, refuting, exhorting, feeding, tending, holding the Word, and setting a good example." The most effective leadership I know anything about is that which is set

forth in the Gospel of our Lord. Brother, if you are ever ordained as an elder, get busy doing the work God set forth for you. Delegate these lesser matters to the deacons and get on with the job of looking after the spiritual welfare of the flock. **If you don't want to do this, please do us a big favor by refusing to serve.**

TRUE LEADERSHIP DEMANDS CHARACTER

Character is not what a man **has**, but what a man **is**. It is not something a man develops after he is appointed an elder. Character is something he must demonstrate long before he is appointed. It must spring out of a "pure heart."

IT MEANS RESPONSIBILITY

A true leader is a **"watchman."** (Ezekial 33:6) Elders are to "watch" for our souls. (Heb. 13:17) False leaders are described as "dumb dogs" that cannot bark. (Isa. 56:10) They look to their own way, to their own gain. (vs. 11) If elders do their job of watching and leading there would probably never be another apostasy. I have observed over the past 52 years of preaching, when elders are on top of their spiritual work; teaching, tending, exhorting and leading by their good examples, there is very little trouble in a congregation. When they are asleep on the job, sooner or later, trouble will come.



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No. 9

"IF A MAN DESIRE THE WORK OF A BISHOP"

Are You Setting A Good Example?

■ --W. R. Jones

■ The inspired apostle Peter admonishes elders (bishops) in the church of Christ with the following words. "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." (1 Peter 5:1-4) Let us consider the phrase; **"being examples to the flock."** Example is from the Greek word tupos {too'-pos}; "a model (for imitation) or instance (for warning): (example, fashion, figure, form, manner, pattern, print." It doesn't take a Solomon to see that to set a good example means **to be a model for others to follow.**

■ Admittedly, our text is **calling on elders to be good examples.** However, a man doesn't just start being a "good example" after he is ordained as an elder. The truth is, a man should have a **proven record** of being a "good example" **long before** he is asked to lead God's flock. Let us consider some ways an elder must be an example to God's flock, the church. *Continued page two.*

■ **EXAMPLE...from front page.**

ATTENDANCE

■ It is extremely important that a man who is an elder or may become an elder set a good example in his attendance to church services. Why? 1. God expects it! (Heb. 10:25) 2. Attendance sends a message to the church. Irregular attendance that cannot be explained by some serious cause, sends a message which says, "worshipping God is not really all that important." Even when Christians miss worship services because of work it should be out of necessity and not simply to make an extra "buck." Men need to be sure their absence is of great importance and not because they have managed their time poorly. Men need to lead their families into promptness. Being tardy to services repeatedly does not send a good message. If one is interested in leading the "flock" he needs to be out front setting a good example in attendance.

PURITY OF LIFE

■ An elder must set an example of "purity in life." He should try to lead his own family into that purity. Members of the church should be able to look at the elders and see how life should be lived. This must not be a "fake" purity which is forced by office or position, but a genuine purity which starts on the inside and automatically shows itself on the outside. Above all men upon the earth, elders should be holy men of God for they are the examples for His church.

GIVING

■ It is not that an elder of the church must give more than others. In fact, that may very well not be possible. In his generosity, however, based on his ability, he should be out front setting a good example in giving of his means.

A FOLLOWER OF THE LORD, BUT A LEADER OF MEN

■ In the Messenger of last week I wrote about "leadership." An additional thought if you please. Elders are to show an example of total subjection to the Will of the Lord. After making sure they are in Divine compliance, they must then lead God's flock into the paths of righteousness. Members of the congregation are commanded, "obey them that have the rule over you." This can only be true when we have godly men to lead us. It has been rightly stated, "a congregation will rarely rise above her eldership." It is imperative, therefore, that elders set us the right example.

■ There is a poem which reads; "I had rather see a sermon than hear one any day." Brethren, I do not wish to make it sound like it is almost impossible to serve as an elder in the Lord's church. It is not, you may be sure! I am urging you to lead the kind of life that makes you "suitable for the Master's use" if you are needed. Don't wait, as so many do, and scramble to set things in order when you are asked to serve. Keep things in order constantly and when asked to service you are ready.

"The love of heaven makes a person heavenly."



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No. 11

"If A Man Desire The Work Of A Bishop"

DO YOU WANT TO BE INFORMED?

—W. R. Jones

If a man is to be a qualified elder in God's church he must be an informed person. In Titus 1:9 elders (bishops) in the church are admonished concerning this matter. "Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convict those who contradict." In selecting men to "oversee" a congregation this verse is often ignored or to say the least, skipped over lightly. As men develop toward leadership in the church we observe their growth. Unfortunately, we zero in on their wives, darling children, business success, general reputation and their ability to keep everyone happy. I am not finding fault with these observations, but just trying to point out that we are overlooking another qualification which is extremely important to the future of the church. The Bible describes ignorant leaders as "dumb dogs." Let us now give consideration to this often overlooked qualification of "knowledge."

ELDERS MUST BE INFORMED

Our text says; "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught." He must tenaciously hold to the "faithful word." However, a man cannot hold fast to the word if he doesn't know it.

-----Continued page three.

◆ **CONTINUED from front page.**

◆ This **"faithful word"** is what he has been **"taught."** No man will accidentally have this information. If a man doesn't study privately and avail himself of opportunities to hear the word taught he will not be informed. Not being properly taught he can't "hold fast the faithful word." Some elders feel that this is the responsibility of the evangelist. It is true that an evangelist must be informed and qualified to defend the "faithful word," but our text is not talking about an evangelist. It is definitely talking about elders. Of course, it is much easier for an elder to content himself with check writing, thermostat adjusting and general building management than it is to study the Word of God so he can "exhort with sound doctrine" and "convict those who contradict." In many churches the work of elders is being done by the evangelist, the work of deacons is being done by elders, and deacons are doing little or nothing. We need to put things back according to the New Testament pattern.

**PROMOTIONAL
PREACHERS AND
IGNORANT ELDERS
INVITE APOSTASY**

◆ Uninformed and misinformed elders and evangelist constantly put the church at risk. I personally believe that this awful apostasy of our "liberal brethren" would never have developed if elders had known and held to the "faithful word." Promotional preachers and ignorant elders opened the gate for the present "liberal apostasy." Let us take note that this learning of the "faithful word" is not something you suddenly start after being ordained as an elder. Men who desire this noble work should acquire and use a study library long before they are asked to serve. I see fine men who could possibly be elders, but they are not equipping themselves for service. In their homes you will likely find many magazine. You probably will not find even one religious paper that might help them know about "threats to the Truth" in other places. Always remember, error that threatens the church elsewhere is likely to threaten the church were you are in time to come. You may find many books in their shelves, but very few reference books that would help them in their study of God's Word. The key word brethren, is "preparation! What for? To please God and "hold to the faithful word," so you can use "sound doctrine" to "exhort" and "convict" those who contradict. If some day, other things being equal, you are asked to serve you won't have to scrambled to become informed, you already will be. In fact, that may be one of the main reasons the saints want you to oversee them.

◆ **Brethren, don't aspire to the eldership if you don't want to study and be informed. If you are asked to serve, do the church a favor, and turn it down. We have already suffered enough in the past from ignorant elders.**



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No. 14

"If A Man Desire The Office Of A Bishop"

In Titus 1:7 we read these words concerning the qualification of a man who would serve as a bishop

(elder) in the church of Christ. "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;..." At this time let us zero in on "selfwilled." According to Strong's Greek Dictionary the word means "selfpleasing." In my fifty-plus years of preaching I have known some fine elders. Unfortunately, I have know a few who were "selfwilled." They would not admit it, but they were. They were always a source of consternation

ARE YOU SELF-WILLED?

in the congregation. Most of the time such elders were "selfwilled" in matters of judgment. Sometime these matters were not of supreme importance, but a "selfpleasing" elder can use "matters of judgment" effectively in controlling a congregation. When I was just a teenager I remember a man in our community who belonged to a denominational church, and he was selfwilled. The members of that group had a name for him. They called him, "Mr. Rule or Ruin." It didn't mean much back then, but later in life I fully grasped the meaning. Its simply, my way or no way. ---Continued on page two.

SEFWILLED....from front page.

SEFWILL AND NEGATIVISM GO HAND IN HAND

Almost without exception, a **"self-willed"** elder will have a **negative attitude**. With this attitude he can control the church. Believe it or not, he can lock up the treasury to good works, determine who serves as the preacher, stifle building improvements, control who comes for meetings and throw cold water on scriptural programs that would move the church forward. How, can he do this?" you ask. Simply because the other peace minded elders go along with him rather than have a confrontation. They are wrong in putting up with this, but nevertheless it happens. So, just as a "selfwilled" child can control his parents, this elder does so over the church. Brethren, if you are called on to help select elders and you see that one is "selfwilled" and heavy into the "negative," please do the church for which Jesus died a big favor, **don't put him in!** The congregation has enough burdens without adding to them.

THE HUSBAND IS THE ELDER, NOT HIS WIFE

Sometime this "selfwilled" problem is not the **elder himself**, but the **elder's wife** who controls him.

Elder's wives can be of tremendous help to their husbands in the Lord's work, but they are **just wives** and **not elders**. Many times I have been invited to elder's meetings as an observer. I have seen decisions made that were suppose to be a "done deal," but not so. One elder goes home and his decision is promptly "undone." This, of course, calls for another meeting where things are changed to suit the elder's "selfwilled" wife. Shame on the rest of the overseers for putting up with such nonsense. Such leaders will have to give an account in the judgment. Brethren, if a man does not have control of his family, **don't put him in the eldership and make the congregation suffer for years.**

MEMBERS SHOULD BE DISCERNING

In selecting elders we don't need to make the qualifications any stronger than they appear in God's Word. However, it is very important that we observe men before they are selected to serve. Once they are in they are usually "long time in." We must not be "picky," but we must be careful. You see, the problem is not just the men who desire the office but it resides with those of us who do the "looking out from among us" and the ordaining. Let's be discerning!