

Plain Truth

"WE USE GREAT PLAINNESS OF SPEECH....." II COR. 3:12

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WHAT ABOUT MAJORITY RULE ?

The church of the Lord is not a democracy governed by popular vote; it is a kingdom regulated by divine law. Christ is "head" over all things to the church." (Eph. 1:22-23). His word is the "law of the spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2), the "perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25) and the standard by which all shall be judged. (John 12:48).

It was the will of God that under Christ, the head of the church, there should be elders appointed in every congregation. (Acts 14:23 Titus 1:5). These men should have the oversight of the flock "among" them (1 Pet. 5:1-3), exercising "rule" (1 Tim. 5:17). They are to be "over" the flock, to "admonish" it and are to be esteemed "very highly" for their "work's sake" (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Only those men possessing the God-given qualifications are to be appointed to this work. (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). When a plurality of qualified men are appointed to the work of elders, then the congregation where this occurs has been set in order. (Titus 1:5)

The question sometimes arises

as to whether a congregation can scripturally function without elders. The answer is that it can. In Acts 14:23 we are told that Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every church. These congregations had been established on their first preaching journey. They retraced their steps (some think as much as three years later, certainly at least a year had passed) and appointed these elders. These congregations existed and functioned during this interval without elders. Such a congregation has not reached the ideal which God ordains, but it can worship and carry out what scriptural work it is able to perform.

Some congregations which do not have elders have decided to appoint "leaders" to do the very work elders would do. If they are not qualified to be appointed as elders, then what qualifies them to assume that very work? I know of one congregation in this area without elders which has selected a "board of governors" to conduct the business and plan the work. There is nothing like this

in the scriptures.

In most cases congregations without elders conduct the work of the church by periodically calling business meetings to which all the male members are invited and all are permitted to express themselves. Some have meetings of the whole congregation in which the women take part in the decisions as well as the men. I have never read a line in the New Testament to indicate that it is the business of women in the church to conduct its affairs. They are not to speak in a public assembly of the church (1 Cor. 14:34). They are to be in subjection, learn in silence, and not to usurp authority over man. (1 Tim. 2:11,12). What business needs to be conducted is to be handled by the male members of the church who are faithful to the Lord.

I often hear it said that in a congregation without elders the work is decided in business meetings of the men by majority vote. I do not believe this is a scriptural concept. The very term "majority vote" represents an idea unknown to the scriptures. The impression is left by this expression that matters of business are to be settled by the sheer force of numbers and show of hands. Bear in mind, brethren, that the church is a kingdom, not a democracy.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH MAJORITY VOTE?

1. When an issue is settled by strength of numbers, this is an

open invitation to division. Such promotes strife rather than peace unity and harmony.

2. Majority rule ignores the fact that all members of the church are not equally mature. It makes the vote of a fifteen year old boy, or a new convert of equal weight with that of a mature, seasoned man. This is in violation of the principle that the younger should submit to the older. "Likewise ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder" (1 Pet. 5:5).

3. Majority rule is an open invitation to political chicanery (trickery) in the church. It affords occasion for men of the spirit of Diotrephes to muster their forces and through political maneuvering work to have their own way. It was through this crack that many instruments of music were brought or the missionary society got into the budget. There have been numerous occasions when unscrupulous men have canvassed every renegade man to prevail upon him to be present to cast his vote. There have been a number of preachers railroaded just this way.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE MATTERS OF JUDGMENT?

No group of men are in a place to decide any matter of divine law. That has already been settled in the word of God. For any group of men to make any decision by majority vote to commit a congregation to an unscriptural practice is for them to commit sin. For a group, regardless of the

vote, to agree not to perform a God-given duty would also be to sin.

But in matters of judgment respecting business and temporal affairs, what shall be done? Suppose you are deciding on a new sign, or new pews, or painting the building, how shall this be done, if not by majority vote? In the first place, all Christians must recognize the principle of humility, and the need to "in honor prefer one another." Brotherly love is kind and considerate, gentle and patient. In a matter of judgment, seek to determine the sentiment of those present by letting all express themselves. When there is considerable objection, then that ought to be evidence that the matter needs to be weighed more carefully. It would be better to table a matter than to force the issue by the power of numbers and create fractured feelings, and thus hinder the work. But what if there is a cantankerous brother who just wants to have his own way? The Bible gives us instructions as to how to handle a factious man who does nothing but create strife and discord to satisfy his own selfish whims. He should be admonished, and then disciplined if he fails to correct his ways.

If the brethren want oak pews and I think pine would be better, I should have enough of the love of God and my brethren in my heart to defer to the consensus of judgment of the others without

having to be put down by a show of numbers. The very spirit of the gospel should be sufficient to show me what I ought to do. Then I can yield my judgment to the rest so that in unanimity we may proceed and act as one man. Someone may ask, what is the difference in this and majority vote? The difference is that one procedure recognizes the New Testament principle of brotherly consideration, of esteeming other greater than himself, of voluntarily yielding in the interest of harmony and unanimity, while the other proceeds on a show of hands and the force of numbers.

In the business affairs of the church, where there are no elders, the best judgment of the most mature men ought to be sought. There are some matters on which some brethren might be much better qualified to speak than others. I know of a congregation which, a few years ago, divided over the appointment of elders by a 10-8 majority in a business meeting of the men. The whole ugly affair wound up in a four-day court trial over who would get the property.

Brethren who claim to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4: 11) need to stop talking about majority rule in the church for which our Lord died. It is an unscriptural concept which has led repeatedly to shameful results

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