

SCRIPTURAL GOVERNMENT
OF
THE CHURCH

By OTTO FOSTER

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PREFACE

The cause of Christ preeminently requires enlightened leadership: sons of God who humbly, faithfully, prayerfully, joyfully shepherd the flock that each may attain to the high calling in Christ Jesus. This leadership must be developed. The elders of the brotherhood should seek out and strive to develop men for this work. Corollary to this the brotherhood, as a whole, should be taught to recognize scriptural church government to be able to select scripturally qualified members for elders and deacons.

As I have grown in grace and knowledge in the Lord, this need for teaching of scriptural church government has borne itself more and more upon my heart. Brother G. H. P. Showalter once said to me that the church could well spend the next twenty years developing its leadership—that for the last twenty years we had been developing preachers and now we could profitably turn our efforts toward the leaders. At every opportunity I have encouraged my fellow elders to become more efficient in the administration of the affairs of the Lord's Kingdom. Their acceptance of me in this work has engendered the belief that this teaching is needed by every group of church officers and leaders in the brotherhood; further that the elders of the brotherhood by virtue of their experience and relationship to Christ and the flock should take a more active part in teaching church government. My experience has demonstrated to me that the elders can do this work more authoritatively and acceptably than can our preachers. It is God's way.

I have, in these articles, given nothing new. In fact,

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they are a compilation of the things others have written and that I have heard and used. I have endeavored to give the truth, as revealed in God's Holy Word—the Bible. My experience fully substantiates this truth.

If the brotherhood generally, and specifically the elders and deacons, would awaken to the responsibilities resting upon them—for which they must give account to God in the last judgment—Christ's work of reconciling the world unto God could be completed in this generation. If the leaders would make certain they are scripturally qualified for their offices; if the elders would teach their flocks to give themselves and of their means as God directs; if the preachers would preach and live Christ, then the followers of Christ could march forward: the devil and his co-workers could not impede their attainment to the high calling in Christ Jesus—eternal life!

This goes forth with my earnest prayer that it may stir many to good works, righteous living and a determination to give God's plan an opportunity to work in their lives; that they come to the full knowledge that only in Christ is life, all else is death.

OTTO FOSTER.

THE AUTHOR

Otto Foster was born near Joshua in Johnson County, Texas, on March 5, 1882, to Samuel T. and Lizzie Foster. His mother before her marriage was a pioneer school teacher in Texas and his father a farmer. In 1890 the Foster family moved to Alvord, Texas, in Wise County, where the children were placed in the Alvord schools. Soon thereafter his father was elected to the House of Representatives of Texas, from that section of the state.

When Otto was 12 years of age he had an opportunity to hear the gospel and was baptized into Christ, April 16, 1894.

After graduating from Alvord High School and Burnetta College, he returned to Joshua, Texas, and opened a drug business. On November 30, 1905 he married Mattie Hagler and to this union was born one daughter, Mrs. Rita Foster Stocking, who now resides in Arlington, Virginia.

The Otto Fosters moved to Cleburne, Texas, in 1911 and became members of the Central Church of Christ. In this congregation he has served as Bible School director, deacon and lastly an elder for the past 30 years.

Within the last few years he has appeared on numerous lectureships and before many congregations in various states, delivering lectures on Church Government, Efficient Leadership and related subjects.

This year he was invited to give a series of lectures on Church Government at the Third Annual Encampment sponsored by the Northwest Church of Christ in Seattle, Washington. There was almost a universal request by those present for a copy of these addresses

THE AUTHOR

and those requests led to the publication of this booklet.

Through his long and faithful life, Otto Foster has grown in grace and knowledge of the Truth to the point where he is recognized as one of the outstanding leaders in the brotherhood, particularly in matters of church government. We seriously doubt there is an elder whose wisdom is more respected or whose talent is more freely given. At his own expense he has answered the call of many congregations to assist in the solution of problems pertaining to church government, and his advice has been universally received with thanksgiving. His righteous handling of the subject, coupled with his years of experience as an officer in the church, makes this work a unique and invaluable contribution to the brotherhood.

REUEL LEMMONS.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This series of lessons owes its existence to the generous acceptance of the brethren who have heard me speak and urged that they be put in printed form. To these brethren I am most grateful.

To my daughter, Rita Foster Stocking, I express my appreciation for her help in the preparation of this study. But most of all, I acknowledge my blessing in my wife, Mattie Foster, whose devotion to the church and to me has made this booklet possible.

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GOD'S QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” II Tim. 3:16, 17.

Through the medium of the Holy Spirit God has revealed to mankind the plan to be used in the governing of His Church. This form of church government was used in the early churches, and this series of lessons has been prepared as an aid to those congregations today who wish to develop according to the New Testament order.

Just because the church of the New Testament is not a great ecclesiasticism with a human head and man-made methods, no one should suppose that there is no organization or system about the Lord's work. Christ's plan is perfect and if conscientiously followed, His children will live in harmony and their work will be done regularly, systematically and enthusiastically.

Those who have obeyed the gospel constitute the church in any locality. But the Lord has ordained that they should unite their efforts or band themselves together in order to carry out His appointments and to be mutually helpful one to the other—thus they become an organization, which we designate as a congregation. This word means about the same as the word church, although we generally use the latter in its universal application as including all Christians.

It is necessary that the place of worship be prepared and maintained and the time of meeting agreed

upon. This, if nothing else, would necessitate some type of organization. There are other far more important things to be done, however, and the Lord has ordained that every congregation shall be an organization with divinely appointed officers.

No church is a model church, nor does it fulfill the divine measure until it has appointed men who are scripturally qualified as bishops, elders, overseers or pastors. Some churches have fallen into the practice of selecting men as **leaders** in the congregation—men who perform the functions usually assigned to elders and deacons, but who bear the designation **leader**. Inability to find men that fulfill the qualifications for elders and deacons is usually given as the reason for appointing “leaders” to handle the affairs of the church. This is unscriptural, for no where in the Bible is there any mention of such an office. It is just as wrong to create an office that is not designated in God’s plan for church government as it is to select men as church officers who do not meet the qualifications as given by the Holy Spirit. In congregations where it is impossible to find men who can meet the requirements of the biblically described office, it is better to remain **scripturally unorganized** than to become **unscripturally organized**. Such congregations should be the exception, however, for in a band of conscientious and zealous Christians there should be men who, if not currently capable, will soon develop into the pattern laid down for an elder. The early Christians in New Testament days readily made themselves worthy for such an office, which example should be an incentive to every follower of Christ today.

If there are no elders, what would constitute a congregation, and in what sense would it be an organiza-

tion? How could order be maintained or discipline be enforced? **Nothing is more plainly taught than that the New Testament churches all had elders over them.**

The mother church at Jerusalem had in it the twelve apostles, but it also had elders—not the apostles as elders, but the apostles and elders. “The apostles and elders were gathered together,” (Acts 15:6). “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, (Acts 15:22). The letter to the Gentiles began: “The apostles and the elders, brethren,” (Acts 15:23). Again in Acts 14:23: “Appointed for them elders in every church.” Acts 20:28 and I Thessalonians 5:12 clearly show that the churches in Ephesus and Thessalonica had elders.

The church at Philippi, often referred to as a model church, was addressed: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi with the bishops and deacons.” Paul’s charge to Titus reads: “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that were wanting and appoint elders in every city, as I gave thee charge.” It is evident that Timothy had the same instructions as did Titus.

From directions given to the churches of Galatia and Corinth we learn each church had its own common fund or treasury into which it put its contribution every Lord’s Day, pointing out the necessity for having someone in charge of the funds and their disbursement.

There is no organization in the church larger than the local congregation. Each church, with its own elders and deacons, is entirely independent of every other church. Some one may suggest it is not necessary to have elders in **every** congregation. If that were true, then it is not necessary to have elders in **any**, for it is

taught that the elders of one congregation have no authority over any other congregation. Paul in his letter to Titus instructed him to appoint elders in **every** city and in Acts 14:23 Paul speaks of elders being ordained in **every** church. These words from an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ gives us scriptural assurance that they must have been **needed** in every church. All the ecclesiasticisms and heirarchies of the present day have come as a direct result of a failure to observe the principle of congregational independence. In the face of this plain teaching, can any one deny that scriptural congregations are organized, each one as an independent organization with divinely appointed officers?

Peter in the book bearing his name says: "The elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder." As a general rule I prefer the preacher who refrains from personal references and should therefore do likewise, but having been an elder in the church for many years, I have heard various criticisms directed against church officers and know something of the problems which they face. Any personal reference or experience mentioned in these lessons, therefore, is done so in all humility of spirit and only with a desire to inspire my fellow elders to become worthy of their high calling in Christ Jesus.

At times I have heard some elders criticised severely by faithful preachers of the gospel for certain actions or attitudes, but chiefly for their inactivity. Unfortunately, much of this criticism is somewhat justified, and every officer in the church should pay careful attention to Paul's admonition to some elders in New Testament days when he said:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit

hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Acts 20:28.

Regardless of how or when you were chosen or started serving as an elder, deacon, or teacher in the congregation, the fact remains that you are a very important cog in God's machinery for the saving of the world. Are you working as you should? Are you carrying your proportionate part of the work? Have you really taken heed unto yourself? To do so requires personal godliness, without which no man's ministrations in the church have any value.

The Holy Spirit has given very definite qualifications for the men the church should select to rule over them. We seem to have the mistaken idea today that if one is a fine Christian man, humble and agreeable, plus possibly a child or two, good or bad, he will make a good elder or deacon. The Bible definitely contradicts this idea. The qualifications for elders as given in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 contain some twenty-one different requirements. Let us enter into a prayerful study of them.

1. WITHOUT REPROACH—A man whose character is unimpeachable, blameless, irreproachable. This does not mean **sinless**, else no man could qualify, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:23). But not a man about whom a whole galaxy of uncomplimentary rumors have been circulated, for generally when there is much smoke, there might be a little fire. Certainly if any unfavorable comments are voiced, thorough investigation should be made. It is God's desire that an elder be known for his spotless integrity and pure life.

2. HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE—Not a polygamist; nor a bachelor; nor a widower; nor one who for any reason has divorced his wife and married another, thereby having one divorced wife and one with whom he lives. The home is of divine origin and the homes of church officers should be complete and happy in accordance with God's pattern in order to be pleasing unto Him. All the teaching in the New Testament concerning marriage is based on the union of one man and one woman.

3. TEMPERATE—Self denying; self-controlled; watchful over himself in restraining the appetites and passions, using all in moderation so as to blend the faculties to the highest degree of activity.

4. SOBER-MINDED—Of sound mind with mature judgment; prudent; dignified; quiet. Not flighty or flip-pant. Not excitable or passionate, but self-restrained, realizing the importance and earnestness of life.

5. ORDERLY—Well-mannered; well behaved, orderly in dress and habits. Kind, considerate, with his inward life corresponding to his outward bearing.

6. GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY—"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares," (Hebrews 13:2). Lover of strangers and thoughtful of others—a quality the elder should possess to such a degree he will influence others to follow his example. Hospitality means being friendly to the visitors who attend the services of the church and manifesting an interest in the new members of the congregation. Hospitality means taking people into your home, not just the visiting preacher, but members who are weak and may be encouraged through associ-

ation with stronger members of the church. It means being hospitable to those who are not members of Christ's body, for by so doing they may come to a knowledge of the beauty and wonder of the Christian home and of the lives lived therein.

7. APT TO TEACH—Capable and ready to teach—not just possessed of a general knowledge of the Bible and things religious, but able to use that knowledge to further the glory of God. An elder's work is to teach and lead others to Christ. To do this he **must** know the Truth and then by kind and faithful example lead the flock in the way the Lord would have it go. It is very important that the elder should have an aptitude for teaching privately as well as publicly. To teach others the way of Christ and to renew the faith of those who have become negligent requires patience and perseverance. Apt to teach is one qualification that is required of the elder over those mentioned for a deacon.

8. NO BRAWLER—Not mixed up in a brawl of any type; not controversial. No fighter or wrangler.

9. NO STRIKER—A striker is one with an un-governed temper, ready to resent insult or wrong, real or imaginary; one who is quarrelsome, ready to fight or strike at the slightest provocation. Some two years ago I visited a member of our congregation who was 94 years of age. I was interested in his life's story and inquired if he had ever, or to any extent, been a drinker or a user of tobacco. Upon receiving a negative answer, I asked if he had ever engaged in a fight. His reply was: "I never hit a man but once, and then only when I thought the man had made an ungentlemanly remark to my wife." This man was no striker.

10. **GENTLE**—Patient; meek; considerate. Not harsh or stern, nor bitter or unkind in manner even to the unpleasant.

11. **NOT CONTENTIOUS**—This does not mean that the elder is not to contend for the Truth, but not to contend and become belligerent over unimportant matters. “But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain,” (Titus 3-9). He that engages in such always lives in foment and strife. “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work,” (James 3:16). Even truth and right should not be maintained in a contentious spirit.

12. **NOT A LOVER OF MONEY—NOT GREEDY OF FILTHY LUCRE**—One who loves Christ and the souls of mankind more than great riches; one who is less concerned about material wealth and the luxuries it brings than about spiritual wealth and its blessings; one who is not covetous or who does not strive to obtain riches by unscrupulous means. The elder must be an example in giving of his means to support the activities of the church—an example in **giving** as well as **living**. The elder should give more in proportion to his ability than anyone else in the congregation perhaps.

13. **RULES WELL HIS OWN HOUSE; HAVING CHILDREN THAT BELIEVE**—The elder must have properly governed children. “Faithful children not accused of riot or unruly,” (Titus 1:6). The question most frequently asked in this connection is whether he must have more than one child. The word for children is generic and has the same Greek ending as “men and brethren.” If I were addressing an audience and re-

quested all who had children to leave, those having any children would be expected to go. It would not be necessary to explain that I meant parents of one or more. The use of this same word in other passages of the Bible will serve to clarify the thinking along this line, perhaps. Ephesians 6:1 reads: "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." If we contend for the plural usage of the word we must accept the fact that before this law of discipline is binding in the family there must be more than one child. Therefore, only when there are at least two children can obedience to parents be expected or required, if such contention for plural be made. If it is true in one, it is true in the other.

Again in I Corinthians 7:14 Paul tells us, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." If the word children is to be taken specifically rather than generically more than one child must be born to the union described in this passage or else the one child will be unclean. Only with a plurality of children could there be hope for holiness. Let us be guided by God's usage of the word in these and other passages and not contend that the interpretation of the word children must include more than one. In passing let me add that one child is as hard to rear properly, or perhaps more so, than several. With several children they naturally learn to care for each other, to share with each other, but with only one these lessons are harder to learn. The man who rears one child properly, so that it is an honor to the home and the church, has God's approval and should have the approval of all

Christians to the extent that he be not disqualified for eldership, if otherwise qualified.

The Lord requires that before being selected as an elder in His church, a man must have experience in the proper rearing of a family, in the training of children in a kind and gentle, yet firm and positive manner, so as to make of them worthy men and women. The emphasis is on the fatherhood of the man and his conduct as such, for if he cannot manage the child or children he has under his care so that they respect him and honor God, how can he manage God's children in the church?

The Greek from which comes the phrase "children that believe" means, according to the accepted scholar Thayer, children that are not heathens. The root meaning is then having children that are not heathens, but children that believe in the one God. The question frequently arises as to whether a man may be qualified for selection as an elder if his children (or child) are too young to become members of the church.

I know of a preacher that has three small children who are the wonder and talk of all the congregation where he labors. These children obey their parents in everything. We have had them in our home and it is a marvel and a joy in this present age to behold such a wonderful family. If this father possessed the qualifications for an elder as given by the Holy Spirit, I would think a long time before eliminating him from consideration because of his "unbelieving" children, particularly in the light of the recognized meaning of the word as given above. Since these children, who respond so readily to parental teaching, are already being trained in the things of the church, it is reasonable to believe they will come into the church when they reach the

age of accountability. Children who dutifully obey their earthly father, if properly taught concerning the love of Christ, will be just as anxious to obey their heavenly Father when old enough to understand their duty. There is very little risk here, from my viewpoint, and as Paul would say, "I believe I have the mind of Christ." Let us not strain a gnat and swallow a camel. Let us not be so narrow as to prefer a man lacking several required qualities over one who meets every qualification, other than having minor children who have not as yet become obedient to the Lord. Let us think as men. "Be strong in the Lord, quit you like men."

The absolutely safe course is to select a man with one or more children that have become obedient to the Lord, but there have been some successful elders whose young children—respectful, obedient, and interested in the church—did not obey the gospel until after their father's appointment to the eldership.

14. NOT A NOVICE—Not a new convert. "Lest being lifted up he fall." The Holy Spirit tells us why a new convert should not be selected: first, he is not sufficiently taught in the scriptures; and second, he has had little experience in handling matters pertaining to the church. The only reason, even from a human viewpoint, for selecting a novice would be that he is a prominent person, a business leader, or a professional man of high regard in the community. But if he were so elevated, he could and no doubt would conclude that he was recognized by the brethren as full grown and that he was capable of undertaking important work in the church. He would be an overgrown babe in Christ, which would be injurious to him and the church.

15. GOOD TESTIMONY FROM WITHOUT—Not only must the believers reverence the character of the elder, but non-members of the church must likewise evaluate him. He must be respected by all who know him. An elder must be a man whose word can be accepted on any subject. He may have evil spoken of him for his fidelity to the Truth, but Christ has said: “Woe unto you when all men speak well of you.” But if a man has a reputation for dishonesty and untruthfulness; if he is known as a lover of money, a miser, a slick trader; or if his moral life has been questionable, the world will be only too ready to attack the blameless ones in the congregation through the stained and scarred elder.

An elder should always be on the right side of any public controversy—there is generally a right side, your side, my side. The elder should always strive to be on the right side.

A man with a checkered past or a bad reputation can repent of his wrongs, change his life and go home to live with God forever if he continues faithful, but he cannot qualify for an elder in the church.

16. NOT SELF-WILLED—This does not mean he is not to be firm and steadfast in purpose, but that he must not possess such a stubborn spirit as to cling to his own will and refuse to listen to reasoning that is contrary to his thinking. Many years ago a church officer ceased to attend the officers’ meetings. We went to see him to determine the cause of his absence. He said: “They decide against everything I bring up down there.” We explained that we did not need “yes” men as officers in the church; that we needed men of ability, men who could think and plan. We pointed out

that some of us had agreed with him on the things he had suggested, but that after due consideration they were postponed or decided against. He startled us by saying: "Yes, but you can take it when they decide against you, but I cannot." He could not cooperate because of his determination to have his own way. He was self-willed and selfish because he sought to please himself. Such a man must conquer himself before he can become qualified for an elder.

17. LOVER OF GOOD—Only men are capable of good or evil—therefore, lover of good men; men of like mind and spirit, interested in the things of Christ. "We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (I John 3:14).

18. JUST—Exact; fair; just in his dealings. Conformable to divine or human laws, with the divine law taking precedence. If human laws are contrary to the will of God, we cannot conform to the human and be safe—for example, legalized liquor traffic or divorce.

19. HOLY—Devoted to God. The three words **sober**, **just** and **holy** present the three sides of human duty. Sober, duty to ones **self**; just, duty to **men**; holy, duty to **God**. In all these the man of God is to show himself a true man. In heart and life—Godly! "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Peter 1:15, 16).

20. SOUND IN THE FAITH—A quality needed in all ages, but certainly never more than now with many popular denominations trying to influence those who would follow Jesus in all things and with Satan seeking to destroy true Christianity. The elder must be

able to judge between truth and error and to watch for and deal with the wolves that spring up in his own midst. He must guide the church into the pathway of righteousness by teaching sound doctrine.

21. NOT SOON ANGRY—Not irritable. God is slow to anger; let us be like Him. Once in teaching an adult class we were discussing being “soon angry.” It was brought out that sometimes a person seems to take pride in the fact that he has a “quick temper” and becomes angry easily, but that a Christian must overcome his temper and bring himself into subjection. After dismissal of the class one of the men came to me and said: “That used to be my trouble, I had an ungovernable temper.” I was startled, for he was one of the calmest and meekest individuals among us and his statement sounded unbelievable. I learned that through self-discipline and dependence upon God he had overcome his difficulty. With God’s help it can be done, my brother, and it must be done before one can be an elder in His church.

Should any more qualifications be added?

22. ONE WHO ALWAYS ATTENDS any and every meeting of the congregation of which he is an officer, when it is at all possible to do so. A man who is not interested enough to be present when he calls his flock of sheep together certainly would not make a good leader, a good bishop, or a good shepherd of their souls.

23. ONE FULL OF ZEAL FOR THE LORD AND HIS CHURCH—A man not only interested but zealously working at his job. “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

24. ONE WITH A VISION—Anxious about extending the borders of the Kingdom; interested in planning greater activity for the church. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). The leader who is content to let well enough alone is not **leading**—he is **dying**.

25. A GOOD BUSINESS MAN—Your congregation may be small now and have little finances to handle, but it will grow. So once was the church in Cleburne, but now it handles many thousands of dollars every year. In 1947, the budget of the Southside congregation in Fort Worth, Texas, was \$33,100; the Sears and Summit in Dallas, Texas, \$47,500; the Broadway church in Lubbock, Texas, \$129,335. Do you not see the necessity of business experience in order to deal with such sums of money in a manner acceptable to God? “Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

Are these last mentioned qualifications really additions?

Am I going beyond that written? No, these are but enlargements of the others. A man who has all the qualifications given by the Holy Spirit would be always present; would be a zealous worker; would have a vision for greater things; and would be a good business man.

Truly this is a high standard. Is it too high? Should it be lowered? We find no intimation that any other will be acceptable. God refers to His children as “kings and priests;” “saints;” “the redeemed.” We are to be a “light unto the world” and “salt of the earth.” If the members are thus described, should not their leaders,

their officers, their rulers be of the highest quality?
God has so said:

Then: Do not try to make qualifications that fit some individual for the individual must fit the qualifications. God has set the standard and woe unto the man that adds to or takes away.

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

“And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” Rev. 22:18, 19.

GOD'S CHARGE TO THE ELDERS

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Acts 20:28.

Take heed unto yourself—look to your life, does it measure up to God's qualifications? Do you more nearly correspond to these qualifications now than when you were placed in the position of an elder, or is your life a detriment to the church? Are you holding it back?

If the church of which you are an officer were choosing now, would it again select you as an officer? How is your life, my brother? How are your actions as an elder in the church of our Lord? Examine yourself today as you have never done before. Do you love the church? Is it really first in your life? Or do you love your profession, your vocation, your lodge, your civic or social club, or even your wife, or your life better than you do the church? Do you spend more money for tobacco, cigarettes, coffee, tea, cold drinks, golf, football, any or all of these combined, than you give to the church?

What do you talk about when you meet a friend? Is it the church, or is it the foreign situation, politics, price of commodities, or what not? Where is your treasure? There is your heart also. Our God is a jealous God and will not occupy second place in our hearts—especially is this true as applied to the officers of His church.

Elders are referred to in the Bible by different

designations and names which give us an insight into their duties:

Elder, Anglo Saxon; **Presbyter**, Greek—refers to experience and dignity of age. Acts 14:23; I Timothy 5:1, 17; Titus 1:5; I Peter 5:1.

Shepherd, Anglo Saxon; **Pastor**, Latin—refers to tending and feeding. I Peter 2:25; Ephesians 4:11.

Bishop, Anglo Saxon; **Overseer**, Greek—refers to one who oversees or supervises, a superintendent. Acts 20:28; Titus 1:7; I Timothy 3:1; Philippians 1:1.

Ruler—one exercising authority. Romans 12:8; I Thessalonians 5:12; I Timothy 5:17.

Steward—one in charge of and responsible to another for his goods, etc. I Corinthians 4:1; I Peter 4:10.

Leader—one who goes before and leads the way. Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24.

Ensample—a pattern or model. I Peter 5:3.

Ten designations, all applied to the same church officer—there is then no divine authority for having any other.

Many of the denominations have divided these designations or descriptions of the duties of the elders into several groups. One has stewards, presiding elders and bishops, each representing a different rank and with different duties and authority. Another has one elder, who is the preacher, and the deacons are officers under him. These are but a few of the deviations prevalent in the denominational world today.

Some of our preacher brethren and congregations are operating, and have been for many years, under men they call "leaders." These men are willing to do

the work of elders, without having been ordained as such. It is not according to God's plan—the elders are the leaders of the congregation. No doubt these “leaders” are good men, likely the very best in the congregation, but **why this new office?** It is no more scriptural than the Pope, the Cardinals or the Bishops of Rome. Very likely some of these “leaders”, or others, are qualified to be elders and deacons—if not, they should be trained to that end. In a very few years any congregation should develop material for officers, if working toward that purpose.

Sometime ago I was asked to go to a South Texas city and give some teaching on the qualifications, duties and work of elders and deacons. This church had been established for some 15 or 20 years, but had no organization, being governed by “leaders.” Their preacher had believed and taught that no one within the congregation was qualified to be an officer. Another preacher moved into their midst who objected to working except under the oversight of elders. Therefore, after the preacher had prepared the ground and I had presented three lessons on the Lord's Day, the church proceeded in an orderly manner to look out from among them men that were qualified to rule over them.

Later I was called back to help in the dedicatory service. When the three selected as elders were asked if they would serve the congregation as designated, each without any preparation stepped forward and made splendid inspirational talks—talks that came from their hearts and gave evidence of their love for Christ and His church. If these men were not qualified to oversee a congregation, they certainly belied their earnestness. These men had been members of the congregation for some time and were among its “leaders” but had tacitly

accepted as true the statement that they had no one qualified among them.

The elders are to be men of age and experience, hence elders or presbyters; they are to tend the flock and feed it, hence are called shepherds or pastors; they are to be supervisors or superintendents of the work of the church, hence its bishops or overseers; they are to exercise authority, when necessary, hence its rulers. They are under-shepherds of Christ the chief shepherd and in charge of His children, hence they are stewards accountable to God for the flock; they are to go before, hence leaders of the flock; and they are to be ensamples, hence a pattern or model for the flock to follow.

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;” I Peter 5:2.

“Feed the flock”—the church. Of all the work that is given to the elders, none is more important than this. The elders are to watch over and feed the flock of God. In becoming elders they bring themselves under the most sacred obligation known to man—to guard and maintain the honor of God; to keep His teaching and His service pure from all innovations of men; to feed the flock with the pure milk of the word of God, so it may grow spiritually. We cannot live physically without material food; neither can we live spiritually without spiritual food. God has provided that food for us and has ordained that each congregation have qualified men appointed to dispense that food. **That is why God has particularly required every elder to be apt to teach.**

If the congregation goes astray for the want of

proper instruction, proper food, the elders are at fault. This does not mean that the elders are to confine their teachings to certain doctrines, such as faith, repentance, baptism, the sin of using mechanical instruments in the worship, etc., but they must strive to teach their flock to observe all that God commands. They should impress upon the brethren that they stand for something; that Christ is to live in them and that they must be about their Father's business, if they would be saved. Elders must see that the flock is thoroughly taught concerning God's great love, that they may feed upon it daily, and thus being filled, may share it with others.

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” I John 4:7.

This teaching should not consist entirely of criticism of the methods and doctrines of others—not all negative teaching, for constructive teaching builds up Christian characters.

“And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” Acts 20:32.

The late Brother F. L. Young used to say: “It is easy to tear down ones religious house, but it is a much more difficult task to build him one in which to live.” Many of us can pick to bits the false teaching of the denominations, but find it difficult to teach the truth as effectively.

Not only should the elders teach concerning spiritual growth of the individual members, but they must not neglect to stress God's teaching on giving and spreading of the gospel. Jesus said, “Go into all the

world and preach the gospel to every creature.” It pleases God to have the gospel presented to the world by the preaching of His servants and those who so give of their time should be supported by the church. Is the preaching of the gospel being supported by you? What is the size of your congregation? If you have ten members that earn a living, could you not support a preacher in his work? The Jews did it, could you not also? Do you not do the things you want to do?

Have you taught the church to give? Isn't that a part of your responsibility? Do you realize the Bible says more about the giving of your means to the Lord than it does baptism? If you fail to warn the members of your congregation of the consequences of spending all they earn on themselves, thus robbing God of His part, their souls will be required of you. I am afraid most of us have enough money to damn our souls, if we do not learn to properly use it for God's glory. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:35, 36.) He gave us all we have—we are merely His stewards. If we fail in our stewardship, what can our judgment be at the last day? “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).

To teach the congregation, the elders must be examples in giving. They should give more proportionately than others, really sacrifice and by their example teach the congregation to do likewise. I knew an elder once who seemingly tried to keep his congregation from spending any money. He was perfectly satisfied to come to church on Sunday morning; to teach a Bible

class in which the different sects were condemned in no uncertain manner and the Truth held up in bold contrast; to partake of the Lord's Supper with few or no comments; and to go home and await the coming of another Lord's Day. The ladies of the congregation were asked by him to can grape juice so that the money it cost to buy a bottle in the store could be saved for the church treasury. If and when anything worth while was accomplished by that congregation, it was when some one took the initiative and pushed the project until they gained a concession. He was the treasurer of the church and its watch dog.

Elders should not be watch dogs of the church treasury, or even fearful that the church will become "broke." This will not occur if the flock has been properly taught. Give the congregation something for which to work and they will respond gladly and willingly. The growth of the Central congregation in Cleburne dates from the time it started to do mission work and prepared a budget to that end. Never be afraid that the congregation will give too much.

Only once did we receive a pledge card that indicated the signer had been too liberal. This was many years ago—the first time we had used the pledge cards. This card promised \$5.00 per week and the signature was that of a railway shop laborer. At that time he was getting approximately \$125 per month and had six children to support and a little home on which he was paying. It was so much in proportion to his income that we decided to talk with him about it. We inquired whether he had meant to promise this amount per week or per month. He promptly replied per week, adding that he and his family had talked it over and agreed they wanted to give that much. Then he asked

us: "Is there anything wrong with that, can't we give what we want to give?" With a lame apology and explanation we answered in the affirmative and that God would bless him in the giving. Soon after, all the workers in the railway shops went out on strike and this brother lost his job. His age was against him and he was never taken back. He has never had a permanent job since, but he has not starved, nor has he ever ceased to be the most liberal giver in our congregation. This has been done with income from yard and janitor work and various odd jobs. Just recently this man heard a report on the work in Germany and gave the officers a check for \$200 to send to that work. His family gives one-sixth of all its earnings to the work of the Lord's church.

No, we do not give too much. David said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psalms 37:25). An example like this man makes me feel very humble. Let's remember we are servants of God and all we have is His. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a saving institution. It was founded by a supreme sacrifice and will ever be kept alive and increasing in numbers and power over the hearts and lives of men and nations by this same principle. The church that keeps its money for years, waiting to spend it for some special purpose or work, is doing wrong, as is any congregation that strives to build up a large bank account. The world needs the gospel and the money given by those who love the Lord should be spent in proclaiming it to all

nations. **May the Lord direct us in the spending of the church's money. Christ will never be pleased with an attitude of trying to save it.**

Thus, there rests upon the officers the responsibility of knowing where and how to spend the money wisely. There are many places where God would be pleased to have the money used, but it is sometimes more difficult to determine where it should **not be spent**. Recently we had a written appeal from an elderly preacher stating that he was destitute and sick. It was a form letter being sent, no doubt, to a mailing list of Churches of Christ. Immediately questions arose—was he worthy? Did he really need help? How much should he have? Since we could not determine this, we wrote to the elders of a church near where this man lived and suggested they investigate and extend the help needed, feeling free to call on us if we could be of assistance. Unfortunately, this procedure is seldom followed.

In the South there is a man who appeals over the radio for a dollar and receives plenty of money. Similar appeals are published in our religious papers very often. Years ago a former preacher asked through the papers for help to buy a tent to be used in preaching the gospel. He received considerable money from our section, but he never bought the tent.

A religious racket is one of the best paying types. We are privileged to give our money to any man or for any purpose, but remember that dollars rightly spent will mean souls saved. Frankly, I cannot see why any respectable venture, including the support of ministers no longer able to help themselves, should not be able to receive assistance from some congregation with an eldership. Such a congregation could take the responsibility of attesting to the worthiness of the project;

could handle all funds and publicity, if needed; and by this means all transactions could be handled scripturally. In this, as in all other things, the Lord's way is best—and that way is to send it to the elders. A good illustration of how this plan works is the recent experience of the disastrous flood and the relief that was sent to and administered by the elders of the Central Church of Christ in Portland, Oregon. **Therefore investigate. Know what you are doing. Send your money to the elders.**

Not only should the elders have the dispensing of funds for the local work, but for the mission work as well. Often times it becomes necessary or expedient for the eldership of a large congregation to handle the missionary funds for various churches who have had little or no experience in doing such work. Frequently a smaller congregation is unable to support a special work alone, but desires to cooperate in a project that appeals to them. "And the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judea: which also they did, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:29-30). It is certainly scriptural, therefore, to send a special or regular contribution to the elders of a congregation experienced in administering such funds.

Even though this is scriptural, it should be the goal of each congregation to enlarge its field of activity and increase its ability sufficiently to handle its own missionary efforts as soon as possible. When it reaches this point, not only is the larger congregation relieved of the responsibility but the smaller church is strengthened and becomes more experienced in the carrying on of the Lord's work.

"Tend the flock"—shepherd the flock. The imagery here is beautiful. The church is a flock, Christ is the chief shepherd and the elders are undershepherds. As the shepherd feeds his flock and protects them from wolves, bears, thieves and robbers, so the elders must care for the church. They must protect it from evils without and within. If there is a hobbyist in the congregation, the elders should not give him recognition as a public teacher and should prevent him from sowing discord among the brethren as far as it is possible. They should keep out false teachers. They must guard against all teaching and practices that rest on human authority for such vitiate the service of God and defile the spiritual nature of the taught and cut them off from the blessings of God, which come to men only through the appointments of God unmixed with human inventions and traditions.

"Take the oversight"—in keeping with God's plan all activities of the church are to be directed and supervised, in the proper spirit, by the elders. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (I Peter 5:3). This does not mean that they should do all the work themselves. Instead, they should delegate it to others, for by becoming active in the Lord's work they grow and develop spiritually. It is the duty of the elders, however, to see that these activities are properly performed.

The preacher is not to take the place of the elders. The modern pastor system that turns everything over to the preacher is certainly not scriptural, and the tendency of congregations to drift into this practice is regrettable. But to oppose a preacher coming to labor with a congregation is also unscriptural.

The work of each teacher in the Bible School and

the work of the preacher is to be done under the supervision of the elders. If either teaches error the elders must admonish them to give up such teaching and if they should stubbornly persist, which is hardly likely, the elders must assume the responsibility of removing them. With reference to the Bible School, may I suggest that it is incumbent upon the elders, for the sake of expediency, to provide classes suitable to the needs of the various age groups in the congregation, if proper spiritual growth is to be achieved by the church.

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” Hebrews 13:7.

“Rule well”—it is necessary in any well regulated church, family or school that there be a leader, head, deciding voice. In a school the teacher is the ruler; in a family the father is, or should be, the head; and in a congregation, the elders are the head. In a disorganized congregation any officious sister or contentious brother holds the veto power of the church and may impede the Lord’s work. This will never happen where elders are what they should be. They will decide the course to pursue in any matter and their decision will be final. Thus, the Lord’s plan will forestall all factions, disagreements and dissensions.

The elders should consult together and reach an agreement among themselves before bringing a matter before the church. In all cases where no principle of right and wrong is involved, the elders should have due regard for the wishes of the congregation. When the question is one of mere convenience or preference, the congregation should be consulted—for example, the time of meeting; the budget of the church, or even

the selection of a preacher for local or evangelistic work. It is not only expedient that the congregation know how much is contributed and its disposition, what missionary effort is being supported, and such related items, but it is right.

The elders should rule their flocks in somewhat the same manner that a kind, tactful, yet firm and watchful father rules the family. If any should doubt that God does not intend that elders rule in this manner, let them look to the meaning of the words that designate elders and read I Timothy 5:17 and Hebrews 13:17, 24.

Even though God has ordained that the elders rule, it is not His plan that they usurp authority or allow their office to give them a feeling of self-importance. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (I Peter 5:3). It is only when they have removed from their lives any such characteristic that they are qualified to serve. Elders are only human and in their dealings with others should remember the greatest thing in the world is a **humble Christian**. They should be leaders, rather than rulers in the commonly accepted meaning of the term ruler. "Follow me as I follow Christ," said Paul.

"Watch in behalf of the souls of the flock"—elders are responsible for the spiritual condition of their members and will be held accountable unto God for their souls. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is profitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17). This requires active, constant watch care over each individual. It often requires advising with them, praying with and for them, hearing and

keeping their confidences and giving careful and considered advice. Oh, the responsibility of eldership!

“Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2.

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James 5:16.

James tells us “That pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). Upon the elders rests the responsibility for seeing that the brethren practice this pure religion that their souls may be saved. Efficient elders will arrange a program of work that will be conducive to the spiritual growth of the congregation. One of the best ways to keep the flock “unspotted from the world” is to include in that program a devotional midweek service. At that time the saints may assemble, sing songs of praise, go to their Heavenly Father in prayer and refresh their souls in God’s love. Participation in a service of this kind will strengthen the Christian and draw others closer to God.

“Ensamples to the flock”—it is the duty of the elders to be examples of spiritual growth. (I Peter 5:3.) I have known of a few who were recognized as elders who could not and would not even try to lead a public prayer. Think you that these were chosen by the Holy Spirit to lead the flock? This is a travesty on the divine order. Some congregations are being held back by men occupying the position of elders who are not qualified; who are not stretching forward to attain to the qualifications given in the Bible; who are not growing spiritually; and who are not assuming their

responsibilities in the proper discharging of their duties. These men should remove themselves from their office, for they will be answerable to God for their failure to measure up to His pattern.

Let the elders be strengthened in performing their duties by Paul's inspired prayer:

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." Philippians 1:9-11;

and encouraged by God's promise as given through Peter:

"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." I Peter 5:4.

GOD'S WAY OF MAKING ELDERS

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers . . . ” Acts 20:28.

How did you become an elder—was it a coincidence? Were you suggested by a preacher or chosen by the congregation for your qualifications? Was it announced one Sunday morning you would be named as an officer of the congregation two or four weeks later, if there were no objections? Very often, be it said with regret, church officers are placed over the congregation in that or a similar manner.

It has been said that a poet is born, not made. This is also true in a limited sense of an elder. Some men have by nature what others have by culture and attainment. Some men are kind, gentle and meek by nature, while others have to develop those graces. There is no doubt that some qualifications required in an elder are attained or developed as he grows in grace and knowledge of the Truth, but there must be inherent in him a love of God and a willingness to recognize His divinity. But whether natural or acquired, an elder **must possess** these qualities.

On the other hand, sometimes the circumstances of a man's life render him ineligible for the office or work of an elder, even though he possesses the ability and has the desire to serve. For example, if a man has children who are known to be guilty of misconduct, to be riotous or unruly, or if his wife is a busybody, a tattler, or such, he is not suitable for an elder although he may not be responsible for his family's misbehavior. This

may appear to be unjust, but if the members of his family were to have difficulties with other members (and possessing such characteristics they might easily do so), he could hardly be an impartial judge.

Every congregation should constantly develop and train men with a view to preparing them for the eldership, so that whenever there is a need for them, they will be ready to serve. Soon after I was made an elder of the church in Cleburne, I noticed that one of the younger men in our congregation was serving as secretary for several Masonic organizations in our town. I decided that if he possessed qualities that made him valuable to the Masons he had qualities that could be put to good use in the church. I courted his interest in the work of the church and before long, as Bible School director I asked him to teach a class in our Bible School. He consented and gradually became a good and interested worker in the church. When the congregation selected new officers, he was chosen as a deacon. Later he was selected as an elder and became one of the most valuable and beloved officers the congregation has ever had. Until he moved from Cleburne, he was secretary of the officers' meetings, keeping a set of records that would be a credit to any man. He could and did do anything that needed to be done. He soon discontinued his lodge work for he found that working for the Lord and His church was more glorious—he was living on a higher plane and worldly affiliations faded into insignificance.

There is no greater responsibility or nobler work than that delegated to an elder of the church. Therefore, the eldership is an office for which one should be trained. Our Christian Colleges should give emphasis to this important phase of the work of the church and

each Christian should train himself by daily study of God's word.

"If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work" (I Timothy 3:1). In this sentence the word desire is used twice, but they have different Greek derivations. The passage might be paraphrased thus: "If a man seeks the office of a bishop and gives himself up to the preparation for it, he is desiring an honorable work." No man should scheme or resort to intrigue to obtain the office of an elder; the only way to attain it and be pleasing to God is to train for it by aspiring and working to possess the qualifications; by doing a work that would merit the respect and esteem of the congregation; by growing in grace and the knowledge of the Truth and by practice of self denial and self control.

The man who seeks the office of a bishop will learn to teach by teaching; he will learn to admonish the erring by practice. Every Christian should be spiritually capable of doing all that is required of an elder, except **ruling** and **overseeing** the congregation. Therefore, the man who is rich in experience in the ordinary duties of a Christian should be able to perform the work of an elder. The man that most faithfully lives the Christian life and who has had the widest experience in Christian service is usually best fitted for the duties of an elder, if he is otherwise qualified.

There are some who believe that if a man does the work of an elder, he automatically becomes one and no selecting or appointing is necessary. **This is not a satisfactory or scriptural way of becoming an elder.** If he does the work and **everyone** agrees to his assuming the duty, if the congregation submits to him and is perfectly willing to be ruled by him, then he is an elder,

but seldom, if ever, is this the situation. Usually when he has not been specifically designated for this office someone is likely to accuse him of usurping authority when he assumes the oversight of the congregation. Also they would resent his handling matters of discipline, should they arise. Let us look to the Bible for God's way of making elders.

In the New Testament the elders were appointed: "And 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 14:23). "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Titus 1:5). They did not merely assume the position. It would not have been at all necessary to leave Titus in Crete to **appoint** them if no appointing were necessary. The Holy Spirit has given minute instructions as to the kind of men that should be appointed. These instructions are unnecessary if any man who does the work of an elder is thereby constituted as one. The Holy Spirit would have given only the **duties** of an elder and said nothing about the qualifications if that contention were correct. If a woman should do the work assigned to an elder would she be an elder? If a new convert immediately began to do the work of an elder, would that make him one? If so, the precaution against appointing a novice was useless—likewise the charge to rule well his own house.

If one contends that the eldership is not an office among Christians which a man can enter and hold only by the consent and appointment of those whom he rules, then we can only conclude that the qualifications set forth in the scriptures are useless and absurd. The

elder can not rule the church unless the church agrees to submit to him and to recognize him as an overseer. **God's Word definitely teaches that the elder should be appointed or set apart in the congregation.**

Therefore, since elders must be placed over the church by some authority, two questions naturally present themselves: (1) Who can or should do this appointing, and (2) how is the appointing done and by what ceremony?

The congregation should first be taught thoroughly regarding God's plan for scriptural church government. At the conclusion of such teaching, after carefully and prayerfully considering the qualifications and duties of such officers some method acceptable to the members should be followed in making known the church's selection. **Select, elect, or set out those chosen.** No one should be selected who was not suggested by most of the members of the congregation as being qualified. It is my opinion that in the case of the elder no man should be considered that was not selected by at least 75 percent of the membership.

“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you . . . ” (Acts 6:3). The congregation can select in any way that would be “decently and in order.” If the church has not been organized, has no officers, then the congregation as a whole must do the selecting. There should be no politics, no canvassing, no suggestions circulated, but each member, after much prayer and meditation, in accordance with his best judgment, should select or suggest only those whom he knows to be scripturally qualified to serve as elders and deacons.

Recently I was called to a place in another state where the elders had all resigned and they were ready to make another selection. They had agreed upon a

procedure, but if reports that came to me were true, some were playing politics, canvassing for one individual in preference to another. This is not only wrong, but it must be displeasing to our Lord for His children to bring the church down to the level of cheap political maneuvering. God forbid that Christians should ever stoop so low. If ever so tempted, read Acts 8:18-24. Simon was no further from understanding the true nature of God's Kingdom than are they who play politics in the selection of church officers.

No one should suggest a person that he does not know well enough to evaluate his characteristics. On one occasion when we were receiving suggestions for church officers, a woman came to us who said she was not well enough acquainted with the men in the congregation to make a selection, adding that she knew only one man that she felt was qualified and asked what she should do. We told her to suggest him and no other. This she did for both elder and deacon.

I have on numerous occasions seen suggestions written on a piece of paper and signed, so that those in charge of the selection could determine, if necessary, between the suggestions made by the older members and those made by the children. At other times, when the congregation is small, I have seen the one in charge talk to all present, at least to all the men, and then announce the selection.

If a congregation is already organized, the elders should know, by reason of their work and close contact with the individual lives of their flock, those best suited for officers. After much earnest prayer, they could then select those possessing the qualities described by the Holy Spirit.

Too much care cannot be exercised in making this

selection, for it is perhaps the most important step taken by a congregation. If one will solemnly turn himself over to the Lord and during a season of fasting and prayer ask guidance in his selection, ask help in eliminating all selfish desires, in overcoming all personal preferences and in acting only for the good of the church, then the Lord will guide that one as He did those casting lots when Matthew was chosen to take Judas' place. **One must be very careful that he does not ask God to confirm a choice he has already made or to agree with his decision.** If the officers are to be chosen by the Holy Spirit, as they must be, then one should let the Spirit guide him in making the selection.

In the case of the unorganized church, some Christian or Christians from a nearby congregation should preside during the selection period and determine the results—the elders acting similarly in the organized church. An announcement should follow concerning the decision so as to give the members an opportunity to express their wholehearted approval as well as an opportunity to divulge any information they might possess which would disqualify anyone selected. In order to avoid a serious mistake, the members should be impressed with their duty and responsibility to bring to light any detrimental facts they may have concerning a proposed officer. **It is much easier to put officers in than it is to put them out.**

Having agreed upon those possessing in an acceptable measure the qualifications commanded, the congregation should appoint a day for their solemn consecration to the important work for which the Lord has set them apart. In apostolic days the laying on of hands was used in these ceremonies and I see no objection to

it now. I have even participated in such ceremonies, for I believe it makes them more solemn and impressive. If I stand over a man with my hands on his head and pray earnestly and sincerely for him; pray that having been selected in accordance with God's will that the Holy Spirit continue to guide and direct him in the work he is undertaking, it will draw all who are present closer to God and especially the man on whom hands are being laid.

If there are those in the congregation that object to the laying on of hands and believe that it belonged only to the apostolic age, then it should not be done, but some solemn service should be held. For example, prayer could be offered and those selected might signify their willingness to serve by responding with a brief statement. In like manner the congregation might be asked to stand if they are willing to place themselves under the jurisdiction of those chosen in order that the elders may scripturally rule over them, decide the many problems of the church, lead them into greater fields of usefulness, watch over their souls by admonishing and correcting them when necessary, and cooperate with them in planning greater things for the church. When it is observed that all are standing, a very earnest prayer might be offered by the one presiding and perhaps joined by each elder.

The officers in accepting (and how could they refuse when chosen by the Holy Spirit) should do so with the sincere desire and prayer in their hearts that they might measure up to the standard of qualifications and duties prescribed for them in God's Book.

If our church officers are thus carefully and prayerfully selected and inducted into office, instead of assuming their duties in a careless, haphazard manner, they

will reverently enter upon the sacred duty enjoined upon them, and God will be pleased.

If one is an elder is he always an elder? If not, how can an elder be unmade? After a study of the nature of the eldership, its place in the church and the manner in which it is entered, this question appears irrelevant, yet it is one that puzzles many. No man is an overseer of a congregation unless he is elected, selected, or appointed by the congregation to that office. The same authority that puts him into that position can take him out, if there is a reason to justify such a serious step.

When an elder is made, he and the congregation enter into a solemn agreement and this agreement should be sacredly regarded by both. Neither should think of breaking the covenant or of nulifying the agreement without the best of reasons. If such reasons exist, however, they should be carefully and prayerfully weighed before any action is taken. Also before entering such proceedings think seriously of God's admonition when he said: "Against an elder receive not an accusation except at the mouth of two or three witnesses" (I Timothy 5:19).

When an elder is scripturally appointed he is selected by the members to be over them in the Lord. They put themselves under his watch care and they promise to submit to him and obey him in all that is right. If they do not, **God will judge them.** A true elder is the Lord's appointed—if they rebel against him, they are disobedient to God. Any action taken against an elder, except for scriptural and righteous reasons is **treason** against Jehovah. Remember the example of Miriam found in Numbers 12:9, 10.

When an elder is found to be objectionable to the congregation, when they will not heed his instructions

or take his advice, he should be removed. Even if the cause is his loyalty to God's Word, he still has lost his influence and cannot check error. If he shows partiality in dealing with members; if he lacks patience; if he loses self control and becomes angry when dealing with the problems of his brethren, he will lose their support, confidence and respect. If the elder does anything habitually that is not worthy of emulation or that could not be held up as an example, he should no longer be recognized for he can no longer be an ensample to the flock. (I Peter 5:3.)

Mere imperfections and honest mistakes in an elder are not serious. Remember he is human, too. It is the man who loves the preeminence, the self important man who excites contempt. It is the elder who becomes inflated with the honor conferred on him and desires to show his authority to the extent that he is arbitrary, domineering and demagogical that should be impeached. (I Peter 5:3.) Let him recall the story of Saul found in I Samuel 15:17-23. The Lord made Saul King of Israel, but when Saul proved unsuitable, the Lord reversed his action and deposed Saul. The man who runs everything, insists on his own way, must have his selection for preacher, his song book, his time for meeting, becomes obnoxious and should be retired for the good of the congregation.

If an elder fails to do the work of an elder, the work he was ordained to do, he should not be considered a bishop or treated as the New Testament requires Christians to treat bishops. Some formal action should be taken against him, for if no action is taken, he tries to continue in office and thinks he is entitled to the respect and consideration due him as an officer in God's church.

Many good men go astray and mistakes are sometimes made in selecting both preachers and elders. But if an elder loses his qualifications, there is no alternative but to recall him. One exception should be mentioned, however. If a man becomes disqualified because of the infirmities of age and that is his only disqualification, he should not be removed. Instead he should be considered only as inactive and given all honor and reverence for his past work.

Upon visiting the College church in Abilene, Texas, one time, I saw an unusual amount of interest being taken in the arrival and careful seating of an elderly couple. Everyone seemed anxious to be of assistance. I was curious why so much attention was being given them and asked their identity. An astonished bystander answered: "Don't you know? That is Brother and Sister Sewell—he is one of our elders!" He was the father of the President of the college at that time and although inactive in the eldership, he was loved devotedly and respected by all. Today the photographs of this couple adorn the walls of Sewell Auditorium in Abilene and throughout the Brotherhood their works are a memorial to the Christian lives they lived.

Even if a man is appointed to the eldership by fasting and prayers and the laying on of hands, there is no reason why he may not be deposed if the good of the church demands it. Some years ago, one of the elders in a congregation had the ill will of several of the members and was accused of being dishonest in his business dealings. The church was small and these accusations were injurious to its progress. It was the consensus that this accused elder should resign. He refused, however, and finally a day was appointed for the church to meet and withdraw his eldership. At the time I was

a deacon and because the elders had been unsuccessful in their attempts to persuade him, they asked me to talk with him and urge him to resign for the good of the church. I spent several hours with him leaving only a short time before the scheduled meeting. He maintained his innocence and felt that not being guilty he should not resign and that if he were relieved of his place in the church, he would never return.

When we reached the church building that night we found him there with his wife. The purpose of the meeting was stated and he was asked if he wished to say anything. He arose and made a full statement, denying he was guilty as charged, stating that he had been misrepresented or misunderstood; that he was sorry and regretted the affair, but that if his reputation was injuring the church, he would submit his resignation. He further stated that he had thought only a few hours before that he would not resign and that he would no longer worship with the church, but that his wife had made him see that he could not afford to follow such a course, that he would be destroying his soul. His good Christian wife had made him come to the realization of what he was doing when all his co-workers had failed. He was a member of the congregation until his death, faithful to the end of the way and if I am as faithful, I shall expect to spend eternity with him serving our Lord.

The Lord is asked to recognize and bless the action when a man is made an elder and the action must not be rescinded unless it is plain that He is not pleased with the man's conduct and would not recognize him as worthy of so responsible a place in His church. Only then can the Lord be invoked to bless the proceedings against a brother. This blessing should be asked and

this action taken, however, unless the elder will voluntarily resign, for a man cannot be **over** people who will not be **under** him.

I say he should resign but generally a man who has disqualified himself does not possess the temperament to remove himself, and it becomes necessary for the congregation to act. When formal action is to be taken against an elder, the whole congregation should come together in solemn session. Every step should be taken with due deliberation and with fasting and prayer. No personal feeling should be allowed to enter into the deliberation—only the desire to do as God would direct.

If all the elders are unacceptable, remove all and select a new group of officers. It is seldom, if ever, necessary to unmake an elder, but **the church is above any man** and if it is best for the flock, it should be done, but with every consideration being given the one or ones involved.

It is in accordance with God's Word to proceed in this manner when removing an elder, but do not forget that He also teaches us to forgive the erring brother if he repents from the heart. Therefore, if the accused confesses his error and manifests his desire to do better and is truly penitent, he should be retained in the eldership. Then forgetting the past, the church should stand behind and encourage him, that together greater things might be accomplished for the Lord.

As a final admonition, and by way of summary, I wish to make it clear that church officers should not be voted upon and elected as politicians are in the secular world—that would lead only to strife and division. Elect is used because of the meaning of the word—we are God's elect. Perhaps better terminology in light of

our understanding would be select or seek out. In looking out from among you, look for men whom you can **agree upon**—not **divide over**.

“I therefore . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-4.

GOD'S QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS

“Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.”
I Timothy 3:8-10, 12.

The Greek word that is translated deacon occurs some thirty times in the New Testament, but only a few times is it used as an official designation. It means “to minister,” “to serve,” “to attend,” “to help.”

It is generally agreed that the seven men referred to in the sixth chapter of Acts were the first deacons, but they were appointed for a specific purpose and are no where called deacons. In point of time, deacons are first mentioned in Philippians 1:1, and later we find Paul giving Timothy careful instructions as to their qualifications. It is evident from these references that the service of deacons was already established when these Epistles were written. How long before we cannot determine. As in the study of the elders let us look prayerfully into these qualifications to learn what God has revealed by inspiration.

Grave or sober-minded—Men of sound mind with mature judgment; prudent; dignified; quiet. Not flighty or flippant.

Not double-tongued or two-faced—Not spreaders of gossip, but saying what they mean and meaning what

they say. Men whose words are authentic and reliable. Men whose words do not belie their actions.

Not given to much wine—Paul by inspiration of the Holy Spirit instructed Timothy in the qualifications of both elders and deacons. In I Timothy 3:3 he says elders should not be given to wine and in I Timothy 3:8 he says that deacons should not be given to much wine. From this phraseology it might be considered permissible for the deacons to partake of wine in small quantities. However, in light of the teaching as given in the Roman letter, it is evident that such a practice could become a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in a brother's way. "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Romans 14:21). Consequently, rather than offend or weaken a brother, and for the glory of God, deacons should **not be given to wine in any amount**. If they are so suffered, how can they ever attain to the qualifications of the eldership?

Not greedy of filthy lucre—no lover of money—Like the elders they should be liberal givers and not covetous.

They must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience—They must be sound in the faith like the elders, even though they may not be able to teach it to others. They should "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." They should not waiver in their Christian life—"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (I Corinthians 16:13).

The husband of one wife—God recognizes no other relationship.

Ruling well their own houses—Deacons must have

a family consisting of a wife and one or more children, and rear them carefully and correctly so that they are not only obedient to their parents but to the Lord.

Not a novice—They must first be proved. They must have been in Christ's Kingdom long enough to be fully cognizant of their responsibilities and to have a sufficient understanding of the scriptures to enable them to follow God's directions for the management of the affairs of the church.

Good report—Blameless reputation. Well spoken of by those in a position to observe their daily actions and to evaluate their characteristics.

Full of the spirit—Zealous; anxious for the Lord's cause. Their lives should be so attuned to God's Word that His spirit is manifest in them.

These qualifications are not as numerous as those of the elders, but are no less essential. God describes in these scriptures a very fine Christian character and outlines a worthy office.

There is but little information on the functions of deacons. The meaning of the word and the information that is given, however, leads to the conclusion that they were to advise with, help or do any work assigned them by the elders. From my experience, gained by more than a half century in the church, I would say the counsel, the advice, the help and information given by the deacons in joint meetings with the elders is their most valuable work. In this capacity they have always been willing and capable helpers in presenting a cross section of the congregation's views. In all matters that pertain to the general conduct of business affairs, they should be considered as equal to the elders.

In the New Testament church the deacons and eld-

ers had different duties, no doubt, but certainly the work of the deacons was under the supervision of the elders. In this generation, it is generally agreed that the work of the deacons is to look after the temporal affairs of the church—to be the building committee; to look after the lighting, heating, cleaning and maintenance of the church building; to see about the proper ventilation; to handle the seating of the congregation; to see that the emblems are prepared and accessible; to have the baptistry always ready, whether indoors or out; to care for the poor of the congregation, recommending to the elders worthy cases that should be supported by the church. This seems to be a proper division of their duties and if they have been assigned by the elders, they are required to be faithful in the performance of them.

“For they that have served well as a deacon gain to themselves a good standing.” The service of the deacons in looking after and caring for the needy and afflicted, relieving their temporal needs, teaching them the way of the Lord, gains for them a good understanding and skill as teachers of the word of God.

“And great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus”—the scriptures do not contemplate going among the sick and afflicted administering to their necessities without teaching them the Word of God, admonishing them as to their duties. In so doing the deacons gain strength as Christians and develop courage and boldness in teaching the word of God. **Through service of the deaconship a man grows into the qualifications and fitness for the work of the eldership.** It does not always follow that a deacon will become an elder, and in some cases it is not best, but when one has served well as a

deacon, he is usually better qualified for an elder than another with less experience.

In addition, it is a duty of the deacons to assist in keeping the work of the church ever moving onward. The officers should never be satisfied with the work they are doing, but should strive continually for a greater vision—more preaching of the gospel. God's people must never perish for want of a vision. Every year the work, if possible, should excel that of the previous year and this is usually possible in a congregation inspired by efficient leadership.

Church officers should strive to become more familiar with God's plan for acceptable church government. By visiting and observing other churches that have been established after the New Testament order, a broader knowledge of such matters may be obtained. If the officers always remain at home and never observe any other congregation at work, they are apt to make few, if any, changes for the betterment of their work. Exchange of ideas with aggressive growing congregations who have a reputation for good works, gives the officers a new perspective and serves as an inspiration to accomplish more in their own congregations.

Church officers should have no outside interest that hinders them in the business of serving the Lord. The local minister of the church in Arlington, Virginia, told me that in his opinion, they had one of the finest group of officers he ever knew. He substantiated this statement by explaining that these men seemed to be always thinking about something in connection with the work of the church. It was not an infrequent occurrence to be called by one of these men as late as 11:00 p. m., requesting the privilege of coming to his home or meeting him at the church building to discuss a mission

project, a move to enlarge the local work or to better the service. Their secular business did not hinder or keep them from placing the **work of the Lord first**.

Not only must the deacons be certain they allow nothing from the outside to hinder their work in the church, but they must be certain they do not allow anything from within to hinder that work. Unfortunately few church officers realize that a dictatorial attitude on their part can be a tremendous hindrance to the work of the church.

In one of the older, and for many years one of the larger, congregations of Texas there was an officer who became a dictator in church affairs. He was a fine Christian man but made practically all the decisions pertaining to the governing of the church. By his arbitrary actions he was responsible for their lack of growth. They remained in their same small building, carrying on their own local work, but doing nothing of a missionary nature. They never enlarged their vision or heeded the cry of lost souls throughout the world. During this same period a neighboring congregation grew greatly and was instrumental in preaching the gospel to thousands in many lands. God never intended that one man should decide all the problems of the church. Woe be unto any officer who improperly handles his stewardship.

Other duties might be mentioned, but certainly these serve to point up the great responsibility as well as opportunity incumbent upon the officers of the church. It should be their earnest desire to serve to the best of their ability so as to bring honor and glory to the cause of Christ. To accomplish this purpose the officers should spend much time in prayer that they might attain the high plain of leadership in the greatest

institution on earth—the church. We always have prayer when our officers meet to transact business of the congregation. If the matter under consideration is of great moment and the decision will vitally affect the congregation or its work, it is discussed for several hours and sometimes several days, during which time we pray individually and collectively for the Lord to direct us in making the proper decision in keeping with His will for the ultimate good of the congregation in the furtherance of the gospel and its influence in saving the world. If the officers will go to God in prayer and seek His guidance—not ask Him to approve their desires, likes or decisions—He will lead them in guiding their flock into paths of greater usefulness.

Finally, in closing this phase of the discussion, may I ask a question directed to each officer personally? **Are you growing as a leader?** You cannot stand still in the Christian life. Either you will **go forward** or **slip backward**. Which are you doing? When you assumed the leadership of your congregation you agreed thereby to perform the duties of your office to the best of your ability. **Are you doing so?**

As you ponder this question and search your heart for the answer, let your mind be refreshed with God's word when He said:

“For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

GOD'S TEACHING CONCERNING WIVES OF CHURCH OFFICERS

“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make an help meet for him. And the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib which the Lord God had taken from man made he a woman and brought her unto the man.” Gen. 2:18, 21, 22.

God in the days of creation looked upon Adam and seeing that it was not good for man to be alone created woman and the two became **one flesh**. Man and woman individually are only halves of humanity—it is God's will that they be one in order to be complete and fulfill the divine order in this life. Separate and apart they go their own selfish ways with a half life. Joined together the vessel is whole and pleasing in the sight of God.

“Wives submit yourself unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.” Ephesians 5:22-25.

“That they teach the young women to be . . . obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.” Titus 2:5.

All Christian women must therefore be in subjection to their husbands, but this is particularly true with respect to the wives of church officers, for they should

be examples to the other women within the congregation in their manner of life both in the home and in the assembly. Usually very little consideration is given to the wives in the selecting of men as church officers; but God in His wisdom has not left us untaught as to the responsibility that rests upon them. When we realize that a man possessing God's qualifications for an officer in His church can be excluded from serving in this capacity by the conduct or characteristics of his wife, we can appreciate the need for study along this line.

“Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.” I Timothy 3:11.

According to the Holy Spirit then wives of elders and deacons must be:

Grave—This means the same here as it does in the qualifications of the elders and deacons. Prudent; dignified; quiet; sober-minded; sound judgment; not frivolous or giddy.

Not slanderers—Able to control their speech, their tongues; not busy bodies; no bearers of idle gossip. Wives who have these characteristics disqualify their husbands from acting either as an elder or a deacon.

Many years ago at our prayer meeting service, where we give everyone an opportunity to make any request for prayer, one of the members mentioned a congregation that was on the verge of going to law over possession of their building. The preacher was the leader of one faction and the elders the other. The preacher and his group were no longer worshipping in the church building, but were meeting in the high school auditorium. We not only prayed for those brethren that night, but we became active in an effort to help answer

that prayer. We talked and prayed over the situation for a day or two and then decided to go to them with a proposition that if they would cease their talk and gossip and come together, our preacher would come and preach to them twice daily for a week. They were to agree they would not discuss their differences with anyone during the week, just attend and listen to the preaching. They were not to ask our preacher to go home with them or to talk to him about the trouble, nor even discuss it in their homes. I was to present this proposition to one group and our county missionary was to go to the other. One group agreed at once and the other group agreed after some hesitation.

The joint meeting began the next day. Five days later we were called back. When we arrived we were told that while the preacher was giving the lesson that afternoon, one sister came down the aisle with tears streaming down her cheeks, confessing that she had "talked too much," and soon others followed her example. That night after the service arrangements for a tentative settlement were drawn up and every Christian went home to pray. They were asked to pray as they had never done before, for the eternal destiny of their souls and the decision as to whether the congregation was to continue depended on their conduct that night. The place where I went for the night was visited by several neighboring members and we all went on our knees in a real prayer service. Next morning we met representatives of the two factions at the church building and asked them to agree upon some men to act as trustees until the church could get themselves in a condition to select new officers. They agreed in five minutes on three men; a preacher was secured to work with them; and the law suit was dismissed. That night

we met for a real love feast, raised money to pay off an old debt on their building and burned the note in the presence of the congregation.

This was a happy ending to a bad situation that had existed for years during which time many Christians had taken sides and had sinned grievously. It was all started and kept alive by the sister who acknowledged she had **talked too much**. Other sisters and brethren had done the same thing and a large and useful congregation was almost destroyed as a result. Regardless of how difficult the task, the **wives of church officers must control their tongues**.

“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth.” James 3:5.

“For he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.” I Peter 3:10.

Sober—The meaning is almost the same as grave. In the light of present day habits, I think it would include abstinence from smoking cigarettes and partaking of cocktails and avoiding extremes in dress either for themselves or for their children.

“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.” I Timothy 2:9, 10.

Women with moderate habits and calm, even temperaments bring credit to their husbands and glory to God.

Faithful in all things—Sound in the faith, unchanged by modern innovations; faithful to God, to their hus-

bands, to their homes and to the proper rearing of their children; faithful in **all** things.

Paul in writing to Titus had the following to say concerning the Christian woman:

“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: that the aged women likewise be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.” Titus 2:1, 3-5.

Too much emphasis cannot be placed upon the admonition to be discreet. Wives of church officers do not always properly evaluate the confidence their husbands place in them. As a result, sometimes officers are held up for ridicule and the congregation suffers because their wives have made known the action of the officers on a particular matter almost by the time the action has been taken. Not being familiar with the specific facts, injustice is frequently done by coloring or misrepresenting the action, which makes the situation even more deplorable. If wives would only use discretion and remain silent, allowing the officers to speak in such matters, difficulties could be avoided.

“Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” Proverbs 21:23.

The officers and their wives should work **together** and wives who conform to these qualifications are not only an example to all active workers in the church, but a great help to their husbands in performing their duties as officers in the church. They should inspire others to join them in being “**teachers of good**” by pre-

cept and example and by doing the work that a woman is frequently more capable of performing than is a man. (Many times it is easier for a woman to relate her problems to another woman than to confront a man with her difficulties, even though he be an officer in the church.)

The woman who possesses these qualities truly fulfills God's divine purpose for her existence—**that of a help meet to man.** (Genesis 2:18.) No greater honor or prestige can come to her than to serve in this capacity. No greater satisfaction can be hers than the knowledge she is exemplifying in her life the attributes of a worthy woman as described by Solomon in Proverbs 31:

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life . . . Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her . . . Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.”

GOD'S LAWS GOVERNING THE RELATIONSHIP OF MEMBERS AND ELDERS

“And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.” I Thessalonians 3:12, 13.

Scriptural church government not only imposes specific qualifications and duties upon the officers of the congregation, but it entails certain prerequisites on the part of the members in their relationship toward the elders and the deacons.

It is necessary that there be some understanding or agreement between the elders and the congregation if the work of the church is to be pleasant and profitable. The Lord knew this and made laws to govern their conduct one toward the other. Since God ordained that certain men should be overseers, it inevitably follows that there should be those over whom this oversight is exercised. The members must make known their willingness to be under the rule, discipline and watch care of those in authority, otherwise there could be no elders and hence no divine organization.

In this connection, it might be well to remind Christians that when they sever their connection with one congregation—go from under the oversight of one set of elders—they must unite themselves with the congregation where they go and make known their willingness to be under the eldership of that church, if they

wish to respect the Lord's order. In keeping with a custom practiced by the early churches, a letter of commendation should be obtained from the church they are leaving and presented to the congregation with which they desire to unite. Romans 16:1, 2; I Corinthians 16:10, 11; Ephesians 6:21, 22.

This procedure will protect the church against those who might trouble the congregation with subvertive teaching, or against those whose manner of life might make them unworthy of fellowship with the saints. If their conduct has been such that they are unable to obtain this letter, they should not be received by the church until everything has been made right with the former congregation and they are eligible for recommendation by the elders.

It is important that members of the church who move into a new locality not delay identifying themselves with some congregation in that vicinity. Too frequently they hesitate to discontinue their affiliation with the old home congregation for sentimental reasons. But it should be remembered that the church in a given locality is composed of the Christians in that community and they should not fail to place themselves under the eldership and assume the responsibility incumbent upon members of God's church in carrying on the work the Lord left for His children. On the other hand some may feel that the church is spiritually inefficient and they would not benefit by uniting with such a group. If this be the case, it is all the more important that they make themselves known and become as helpful as possible in strengthening and encouraging the church. Perhaps by tactful and kind suggestions they could cause the church to grow and develop in accordance with God's plan. God moves in mysterious ways

His wonders to perform, and it is conceivable that in His infinite wisdom He has made it possible for them to be there for the specific purpose of aiding the church. Whatever the reason, God is not pleased if any member of the church neglects meeting and worshipping with the saints.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Hebrews 10:25.

The Lord's laws are perfect. He knew the nature of man before He devised the plan of redemption, and all the laws that He has given to regulate human conduct are adapted perfectly to man's needs, frailties and weaknesses, though not always to man's wishes. All the conflicts, disorders and frictions of earth come as a result of the infraction of God's laws. All our physical ills are caused by the violation of God's laws of health and hygiene, often our own dissipation or excess. Where His laws are known and properly observed, there is always harmony, peace and perfection.

When man and woman lived in their Edenic home and were the companions of their Creator, there was no law given to govern their relationship further than that they should be one flesh. They needed no law then, God's order obtained and all things were good. Both man and woman filled their respective spheres as naturally as the fishes swam in the water or the birds flew in the heavens. The question of their inferiority or superiority to each other never troubled them. It was after sin entered the home of man and wrought its ruin that God told the woman that her desire should be to her husband and he should rule over her.

In the interest of the cause of Christ and for the peace and happiness of each local church, every Christian should learn and respect God's will relative to the organization of the local church. Having learned that each congregation should have elders and having studied their duties and qualifications, it is logical that we should study the relationship existing between the members and the elders, as revealed in the Bible.

"But we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake." I Thessalonians 5:12.

Know them that labor among you—Know, according to Webster, means to recognize as having authority or as distinct from something else. It is in keeping with God's Word that divinely chosen elders be considered as distinct in the true sense of the word and therefore worthy of consideration and respect. Any Christian who ignores the elders and proceeds with affairs of the church without seeking the advice of the elders or heeding their direction is in flagrant disobedience to God.

Esteem them exceedingly highly in love—Analyzing further the passage in Thessalonians, Christians are admonished to esteem the elders, that is to appreciate their worth or to regard them as being of a particular character or stature. The extent or manner of this esteem is also given, for the scriptures plainly tell us **exceeding highly in love**—a love motivated by a profound appreciation for the honor of their work and the dignity of their position.

We respect the President, the Governor of a State or the Judge of a Court, not because their characters

merit deference, but because of their position or office. Men who possess the character or scriptural knowledge required of elders are worthy of esteem, but we are to love them for their work's sake. Elders who are sufficiently interested in the spiritual growth of God's church will render works deserving of this love. Upon the elders rests the responsibility of accomplishment—upon the flock the responsibility of appreciation.

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” Hebrews 13:7.

Imitate their faith — According to this scripture, members of the church are given specific instructions to imitate or follow the faith of the elders. Thus we realize the wisdom and appropriateness of God's qualification that elders be sound in the faith. Those who are weak not only jeopardize their own souls, but are likewise responsible for those who look to them for guidance. God in Matthew 18:6 paints a very dismal picture of one guilty, either by precept or example, of leading astray one of His children:

“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones, which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Instead it should be the desire of the elders to become so well grounded in the Word of God that they can in all good conscience urge the brethren, as did Paul, to follow them, as they follow the Lord. Deep into the hearts of both the members and the elders should sink the words of Paul:

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full

assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." Hebrews 10:22-25.

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you." Hebrews 13:17.

Obey the elders—It is impossible for the elders to rule over the church if the members will not obey them. The eldership is but mere mockery unless their authority is recognized. For this reason, some congregations do not have elders. It is not because they are lacking in qualified men, but because the members love the preeminence so dearly they are unwilling to yield obedience to any group of men, even though they be appointed in accordance with God's divine law. Such individuals discourage the appointing of elders for purely selfish reasons and, possessing that attitude, do not have the requisites for membership in a Christian congregation. To be worthy saints in God's Kingdom they **must obey the elders** in all that God teaches.

If a situation should arise where one finds it impossible to conscientiously obey any ruling of the elders, then he should withdraw his membership from the congregation—there is no other course to pursue. It will never be necessary to take such a drastic step, however, if both the members and the elders have the spirit of Christ and are willing to accept His way of governing. Those who disobey the elders rebel against the will and authority of God and cannot expect His

approval or blessing, for God plainly teaches: "Obey them that have the rule over you."

But this obligation is binding only as long as the elders are following God's commandments and are in keeping with the teachings of the Bible. If an elder does something that you may consider wrong, go to him in the spirit of love and humility and request an explanation of his actions. Perhaps he can explain to your satisfaction or you can show him his mistake. All scriptural elders realize they are not infallible and are willing to correct a mistake. They should welcome advice and correction—otherwise they, and not the members, are rebellious.

Submit to them—The word submit has a slightly different connotation from the word obey. To yield obedience, to comply with or carry into effect is the generally accepted definition of **obey**. **Submit** presents a different attitude on the part of the one performing the action—it expresses a willingness to give up to another, to be submissive or patient to authority. One can yield obedience but not in the spirit of submissiveness, but one cannot submit without obeying. Submission denotes the spirit of obedience. Thus we can readily see that to obey and to submit are two different duties enjoined upon one in his relationship to the elders.

When a Christian becomes a member of a congregation, he automatically expresses his willingness to be under the oversight of the elders of that congregation. When they admonish him, he must hear them; if they find it necessary to reprove or rebuke him, he must heed; if they give him work to do, he must make every effort to fulfill the assignment to the best of his ability. From the elders he should be willing to receive counsel, encouragement and help.

Occasionally someone unites with a church and tries immediately to change the methods and manner of that congregation; attempts to force the elders to submit to him and to remake the whole church in conformity with his ideas. In some instances, the changes might be an improvement, but it is assuming too much authority for one to undertake such a revision uninvited and before the leaders have an opportunity to determine whether he is capable or worthy of assuming this initiative. All the members of the congregation, regardless of their chronological or spiritual age, **must submit to the elders**, if they are to be pleasing to God.

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the laborer is worthy of his reward.” I Timothy 5:17-19.

Count them worthy of double honor—In this passage the word which is translated honor means “salary”; “stipend,” “reward” or “wages.” Paul is here talking about elders and indicates they received wages from the congregation and that those who ruled well were given a double portion, especially those who labored in preaching or teaching. Paul teaches that the honor bestowed upon elders is not only respectful treatment and deference, but also support. From this passage we can conclude that the elders in the New Testament church, at least some of them, were supported by the congregation for their work.

Peter forbids an elder to do work in the church for the sake of money. To do work for mercenary reasons is in opposition to the scriptures—the very idea de-

stroys God's purpose. The man, be he preacher or elder, that undertakes any work with the thought of money paramount in his heart, is not approved of God and will never receive a reward from Him.

While this is true, the man who labors for the advancement of the Kingdom must live and when he devotes his time to this service, it is the duty and privilege of the people of God to support him. If he is willing and able to give freely of his time and talents, it is proper and fitting that those not in a position to so labor, contribute toward his support that he may continue in the good work. The members of the church by so giving enjoy participation in the work of the church and thereby grow spiritually.

Is a similar arrangement applicable to us today? It might be the solution to the problems of the larger congregations. In most instances the preacher has more to do than it is possible for him to accomplish and the elders usually have their secular work that is so strenuous and demanding that little time remains for looking after the welfare of their flock. As a result an assistant preacher is employed to do the work designated for the elders.

A congregation might have a man working with them who could lead the singing, work with the young people, direct the Bible School, answer telephone requests, visit the sick in body or mind, preach at home and elsewhere when necessary. He could oversee his own private business or keep his secular work, but give the church the greater portion of his time, for which he should be paid from the church treasury. He should be capable and qualified and perhaps in time might be selected by the church as one of its elders, if not already one. Such an arrangement might prove

very satisfactory and I believe would be in keeping with the scriptures.

As it applies to this generation, I believe we can safely draw the conclusion that certain duties are delegated to the elders to the extent of their ability; that they should freely give as much time and thought to this work as can be taken from their necessary vocations. But if they engage in this service of the Lord, to the exclusion of their secular business, it is scriptural to "count them worthy of double honor" in the literal meaning of the term.

"Against an elder receive not an accusation,
but before two or three witnesses." I Timothy
5:19.

Receive not an accusation—Any criticism of an elder should be regarded as idle gossip—not to be heeded or repeated—unless it is substantiated by two or three witnesses. If this be the case, and it becomes evident that it bears investigation or that it merits attention for the good of the elder and the church, some action should be taken. Consult some devout Christian, ask God's guidance in handling the matter and in a spirit of love and humility approach the elder in question. Usually everything can be worked out satisfactorily and peace and harmony prevail. If not, we have discussed in previous lessons, the scriptural procedure to be followed.

When members of the church conscientiously esteem highly in love the elders to the extent that they willingly submit to their rule and become imitators of their faith, working with them to the honor and glory of Christ, they have the assurance they are adhering to God's divine plan and that His approval will be their

reward. Paul speaks of this promise in his letter to the church at Corinth:

“Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” II Corinthians 13:11.

THE ONENESS OF THE ELDERS, THE PREACHER AND THE CONGREGATION

“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16: 15, 16.

The one great mission of the church is to carry out this command of the Lord, who purchased the church with His own precious blood, and whose servants we are. This command was given as His final instruction before His ascension to the Father in heaven. Evangelizing the world—the saving of souls—is the work our Lord gives preeminence; other work of the church is secondary. The congregation that is satisfied with its own service and has no intention or desire of preaching the gospel to others is already dead and does not realize its condition. It not only ceases to grow, but will gradually dwindle and fail to function. It has its light under a bushel.

Contrariwise, a congregation that is striving, individually and collectively, to tell the story of Jesus, to preach the Word of the Lord to the world, to save men from their sins, and to enlarge the borders of the Kingdom will be constantly blessed of the Lord and will grow in numbers and in power for good. The teaching of Christ has been the crying need of the world since His earthly ministry and shall continue to be until He comes again to receive His own. One means of publicly presenting the teaching of Jesus is by the preacher as he preaches the Word of God in the public assembly.

There is prevalent in the world today, particularly in the British Isles, the belief that the preaching should be done largely as "missionary work"—that the members of the church should carry on the local work under the oversight of its elders and release the preacher for strictly "missionary" efforts. In America we have long ago found this arrangement less conducive to the greatest growth. We have observed that the congregations that have preaching every Lord's Day grow more rapidly in knowledge of the Truth, in performance of good works and in numbers. The congregations without a local minister and with a preaching service no more than twice a month, become stagnant and unproductive.

At one time our local preacher developed a throat condition that required a very delicate operation and necessitated his being out of the pulpit for quite some time. At that time the congregation was in debt and for this reason, it was the concensus of the officers that during this period a substitute preacher for Sundays only should be arranged, thus affording an opportunity to reduce the indebtedness. We discovered, however, that the longer this arrangement was followed, the larger our indebtedness grew. Regardless of our teaching, the contributions continued to fall off very noticeably. In desperation we selected a full time preacher, explained to him our acute financial condition and arranged to pay him a specified amount as long as the contributions would justify. From the very first week he started laboring with us the Lord's Day contributions increased and continued to do so until in a short time we paid off the entire indebtedness, which had grown to a sizeable amount.

To be a growing church it is essential to have regu-

lar preaching and that necessarily calls for a full time local preacher. When a congregation is selecting a man for this work, many questions naturally arise. What factors should enter into the selection? Where can he be obtained? How can he be supported? Particularly is this the problem of the smaller churches. In previous discussions, we have indicated that the congregation should be considered in this selection, but if there are elders, the final decision and arrangements with the preacher should be made by them.

Once the decision is made the members' imaginations start working immediately. Question after question crowds into their minds—will he be tall or short, handsome or homely, friendly or distant? Will he have a wife—if so, will she be liked? Finally they wonder if his preaching will be satisfactory, indicating that greater emphasis is placed on his personality than on his ability! Also some question the likelihood of his being as good as his predecessor. On they go with their thoughts and comments—if the new preacher should fail to please them the first time they hear him their criticisms become very pronounced and before long they have decided definitely that he does not measure up. They even tell their friends their evaluation of him and sometimes go so far as to tell the preacher himself! They do not try to cooperate with him—they have already decided he will not be suitable and make this known to the elders. If enough protests are received, the preacher is asked to find another place of activity. Is this hypothetical description overdrawn? In some cases, yes, but not so in others. The preacher is not given a fair chance.

Let us consider the preacher who finds himself in such a dilemma—he perhaps is a young man with the

zeal, the determination and the capacity for work that goes with youth. No doubt he has been brought up by strict and godly parents in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and seeing the need of gospel preaching and being filled with love for lost humanity, he has prepared himself for this work. In some instances he has spent four years in a Christian College before coming to this congregation and forthwith it is decided he is is not satisfactory or that he does not compare favorably with his predecessor and is therefore dismissed. While this is happening, the elders reiterate their love for him, at the same time explaining that it is for the betterment of the cause that they are letting him go, or that the support has fallen off to such an extent there is no alternative. Brethren, **such is hurtful and injurious to the man so dismissed**, and is likewise detrimental to the congregation. Moving is burdensome and costly—educational preparation for preaching the gospel entails expense. If you are sincere in your profession of love for him, there is no better way of proving that love than to keep him long enough to give him a fair opportunity.

In a situation like that described, the responsibility cannot always be attributed to the inability of the preacher to meet the qualifications, for upon the elders falls the responsibility of making a thorough investigation of the proposed preacher before he is selected. Did you check on him before you asked him to move to your city? Did you find out about his ability to proclaim the Word, his personality traits, his reputation? If he had been engaged in secular work, did you check on his manner of handling that? If you did not, you are being doubly unfair to your minister—criticizing him for a lack of qualities which you did

not ascertain previously. The Bible teaches us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. In the spirit of that teaching, the elders should examine carefully the prospective preacher to determine if he preaches the Word in its purity and simplicity; if he possesses a Christ like spirit; whether his conversation and manner of life is wholesome and exemplary; if he is charitable and understanding and whether there abounds in him other similar attributes.

One requisite often overlooked is that he must be one filled with a zeal to preach the gospel at home, abroad, on land or sea—everywhere! To accomplish this goal he must be capable and unafraid to teach the congregation to give of their means for that purpose. These are lessons that must be taught over and over again. To reach the pocketbooks of the members, it takes periodic preaching and teaching lest they forget. **More members of the church will probably go to hell for their stinginess, robbing God, than for any other one sin.** We all like to spend money, or keep it, but for ourselves. We save and save, pass it on to our children, who perhaps would make better citizens if they had to earn it as did we. There is also the possibility they might marry out of the church and their companions would not be interested in giving, depriving the church of the benefits it might otherwise receive. It would be far better to build mansions in heaven with the money and our children will come nearer following this worthy example. We must practice what we preach. We have the Truth and we must take it to the lost of the earth if we expect to spend eternity in heaven. The local preacher plays an important part in such teaching and work with the congregation.

It may be the experience of your congregation to

have a preacher who measures up to these requirements and yet makes no converts or produces no visible results. More than likely, the trouble is not with the preacher, but is due to the hardness of the hearts of the worldly and sectarian people in the community. The trouble may also be caused by a lackadaisical, uncooperative attitude on the part of the members of the church. The minister's success or failure depends to a great extent upon the reaction of the membership. If a majority of the congregation is still wedded to the previous minister it is reflected in the progress of the church. Such a condition should not exist—that preacher is gone and will probably never labor with the congregation again; so leave the past behind and push forward to the high calling in Jesus Christ by giving your wholehearted support to the present minister. Give him the love and encouragement he greatly needs to render a worthy service in the church. God instructs you to do so. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another" (Romans 12:10). Certainly such a divine injunction would not preclude your love and consideration for the man in the pulpit!

A congregation, large or small, should not be made or broken simply on the merits or demerits of the preacher. If successful spiritual growth is to be attained, the members must assume a major role in the activities of the church. It cannot all be left to the preacher. There is a work for all the members, individually and collectively. The making of converts to Christianity is not an exact science and many elements enter into the work of both the minister and the congregation before the final results are achieved. The minister is expected to be pure and godly. It is just

as necessary that the elders and each individual member of the congregation live holy lives to be effective in soul winning. When Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world," he had reference to all Christians—not the preachers and elders only.

The relationship between the officers of the church and the preacher should be one of mutual cooperation. They should counsel together, plan and work together for the glory of God and the growth of the church. As fellow workers with God, **neither officer nor preacher** should seek, or even desire, to excel the other in **authority or influence**. In this connection, Jesus has recorded for us in Matthew 20:20-28, a personal experience with the mother of the sons of Zebudee which teaches a lesson applicable to us today. This mother came to Jesus making the request that her two sons be accorded the honor of sitting one on His right hand and the other on His left in His Kingdom. Jesus told her she did not understand what she asked—that to grant this request was not His to give, but that whosoever would become great in His Kingdom should be the servant of all. We are great in the church only in proportion to our service to God and humanity.

The elders and the preacher should work as a team, each engaging in that portion of the work delegated to him with the knowledge that he has the support and encouragement of the other in whatever is undertaken. The elders should urge the congregation to cooperate and assist the preacher in every way possible in order that his teaching and preaching may be carried on under the most favorable circumstances. If the preacher has to be constantly concerned about appeasing or stimulating the members he cannot be as effective in reaching those out of Christ.

One mistake the elders and preacher must avoid is that of shifting completely to the preacher the full responsibility of teaching the gospel to others. Too frequently they feel that the main function of the minister is to proclaim God's Word from the pulpit and are content to leave all of the teaching of outsiders strictly to him. The Bible teaches differently; it is definitely the duty of the elders to work with the preacher in making contacts with non-Christians and to participate in a program of personal work.

The elders, as well as the entire congregation, should manifest a decided interest in the local and preaching efforts of the minister. Prayers offered in his behalf and for the work he is undertaking, attendance at the various services of the church at home and in meetings conducted elsewhere are manifestations that will bear fruit in the Kingdom. We can never measure the far reaching effects of our support or even our presence in a work of this kind.

Many years ago our local minister was conducting a mission meeting in a small town some 15 miles away and our congregation supported it, not only with their finances, but their presence. One night practically the entire congregation was in attendance and startled the little town by the size of the gathering. The meeting continued for two weeks and the only visible result was the baptism of one young man. Was the meeting a failure—was the effort wasted—No! That young man became a preacher of the gospel and has been instrumental in bringing many souls to Christ, and a live and growing congregation now exists in that place.

The elders should relieve the preacher of as many minor details as is convenient or appropriate. For example, if there is someone in the congregation who has

a special aptitude for making announcements effectively, it is expedient to relieve the preacher of this portion of the program. Certainly he should feel free to emphasize, whenever he deems it wise, any announcement made either in the pulpit or the church bulletin. If, however, it requires his spending some five to ten minutes with preliminaries, it will detract from the effectiveness of his lesson; he gains the attention and can expect a better reception from his audience if he can start his sermon as soon as he enters the pulpit.

There should be no question of preeminence in the participation of the elders and the preacher in the regular public service. We have a member who believes that two or three elders should be used every Lord's Day in some manner, in order to acquaint the congregation with them. This is extreme, for although they should participate in public to the extent that the entire congregation recognizes them as the elders, they are not to be used to the exclusion of other capable members.

The preacher in turn should do everything he can to assist the elders in their overseeing of the work of the church. It is within his province to initiate a program of greater activity at home and abroad. He should present a goal toward which to work and inspire the congregation to accomplish this objective. The local preacher is a member of the local congregation, subject to the eldership, and all of his activities under their supervision and direction. When he is away from the local church for a series of meetings or in some missionary effort, he is still subject to this same eldership. He should keep in touch with his home congregation and upon his return make a complete report of his work

while away. The church at Antioch gives us a biblical precedent in this respect in their sending forth Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 13:2, 3.) Upon their return they met with the Antioch church and rehearsed all that God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27.)

There comes a time in each congregation when the preacher is changed, either as a result of his own choosing or because it is deemed best for the cause of Christ. If the preacher is unfaithful or unworthy of his calling he should be dismissed, but too frequently a good man may be asked to move elsewhere because some have become tired of his manner of preaching or for some other such insignificant reason.

Changing preachers can become a habit and one that is injurious to both the preacher and the congregation. As a general rule, it is unwise to change too often for very few congregations can learn and fully appreciate the worth of a godly preacher in the space of a year or so. The politicians are given a two year term to prove themselves, and if at all efficient, they are rewarded with a second term. Let's surpass the politicians, brethren, when it comes to kindly consideration. Let's keep our prejudices curbed if we would be fair and spiritual. Every preacher has his own way of doing things and should not be expected to follow the pattern of his predecessor. The only thing that is important is that the result be the same—that of saving souls for Christ. Paul and Apollos, both outstanding preachers in the New Testament days, were no doubt very different in their mannerisms, yet both preached the same doctrine and were approved of God.

When the preacher leaves, it takes several months to become adjusted to a new minister and to learn to

work with him to the best advantage—thus we see it is costly in many ways to change preachers. It would be wiser to not hold back our support, not thwart the minister's every design, but to cooperate and work with him to the honor and glory of God.

Sometimes, however, a change is best for the work's sake and the preacher and the elders should be so closely bound in Christian love they can discuss these matters calmly and unfeelingly and frankly express their decisions without bias or personal feeling. One time a preacher inquired of an elder regarding his progress in the church. The mutual understanding these two men enjoyed made the elder feel free to tell the preacher that his work was fine, but that his wife was not being accepted by the sisters. He did not become angry, but rather appreciated this frankness and remained with the congregation many years after that. This is an example of close cooperation, love and understanding between the elders and the preacher.

It has been the experience of our congregation to change preachers only when it has been necessary as a result of their moving to a new field of activity. We have yet to dismiss one or have any difficulty in one remaining too long. Our present minister is in his sixth year with us and has refused offers that would pay twice as much for less strenuous work. Why does he stay? Perhaps because in our congregation peace and harmony prevail, a spirit of cooperation exists and the relationship between the officers, the preacher and the members is conducive to the advancement of the cause of Christ in our community.

A church where love abounds, where each individual in the congregation, regardless of his status, strives earnestly and zealously to become more ef-

ficient in the work of the church, and who leads others by precept and example into greater fields of usefulness in the glorious work of saving the world—is a church approved of God.

It is my prayer that every congregation may so conduct itself as to be worthy of the blessing pronounced by Christ upon the church at Philadelphia:

“I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

‘Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that shall dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly, hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

‘Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven, from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.” Revelation 3:8-13.

GOD'S FINANCIAL PLAN FOR CHURCH WORK

"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 20:35.

**". . . freely ye have received, freely give."
Matthew 10:8.**

God has revealed to mankind a perfect plan of salvation, a perfect criterion for the Christian life and a perfect church organization. In the framework of that organization He has set forth a plan for the financing of His church.

The work of the church in preaching the gospel at home and abroad, in edifying the members of the congregation, in caring for the needy and in providing a place of meeting requires that sufficient funds be provided. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot scripturally handle this need other than by following God's systematic plan as given in the New Testament. Once, the church in Jerusalem, in order to meet a special condition, made themselves poor by giving all they had. (Acts 4:32-35.) To that circumstance was added the distress of a famine (Acts 11:27-30) which placed them in dire need of assistance. God, through Paul, revealed to the churches how they should meet that particular need. The same instructions given then suffice to cover the need of churches in this generation:

"Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." I Corinthians 16:2.

“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”
II Corinthians 9:7.

These passages present a clear concise plan, free of complications or any unreasonable regulations and embodies certain principles worthy of special consideration:

It is **periodic**—“Upon the first day of the week”—every week.

It is **personal**—“Let every one of you”—each one.

It is **provident**—“Lay by in store”—put in the treasury of the church.

It is **proportionate**—“As he is prospered.”

It is **preventive**—“That no collection be made when I come.”

It is **preceptive**—Contingent upon the precept “not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

The financial wizards can offer no destructive criticism of this divine plan. Its success lies in its simplicity. For the **individual** to give cheerfully **once** a week, a **promised** sum according to his **personal ability** for a **definite purpose** requires no long detailed procedure and it eliminates special and repetitious demands.

To give to avoid unfavorable criticism or through a sense of duty; to give with a desire for recompense or to receive recognition, makes the gift of a Christian unacceptable to God. The blessing that comes through giving can only be enjoyed when it is done in a liberal, cheerful manner to the glory of God, for Jesus has said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” I met a man

on the street one day that engaged me in the following conversation: "I am a member down there, (nodding to the church building) and I guess you expect me to give something toward the support of the work. If you will tell me how much I owe I will pay you, as I seldom get to come." This man had missed the underlying principle of God's teaching on giving, for He is not so interested in what we give as the spirit in which we give it.

From II Corinthians it is evident the Macedonian Christians had followed Paul's instruction "to purpose in their hearts," but had failed to follow through to the extent of collecting the money needed. Paul felt it necessary to give further admonition in the matter:

"Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness." II Corinthians 9:5.

This additional urging may be considered the scriptural basis for pledging, for Paul's words could easily be paraphrased to read: "Now brethren, make up your pledges, keep your promises unto the Lord." The preceding chapter teaches that these Corinthians had shown a "readiness to will" a year prior to the actual giving of the money. Paul merely urges them to "perform the doing of it" according to their ability:

"And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have." II Corinthians 8:10-12.

These verses teach in unmistakable terms that the Corinthians promised (or pledged) a definite amount to the Lord's cause, that they did so a year beforehand, that Paul was anxious for their souls, and that they keep their pledge even to sending some brethren ahead to "make up beforehand their aforepromised bounty or contribution." The instruction "lay by in store" was for the purpose of having the money available before Paul's arrival so that there would be no collections when he came. In order for the congregation to make such a pledge, it was necessary for the individual members to purpose or promise to give a definite amount. Each Christian is to give "according as he has purposed," for it is this previous planning that determines his gift.

Some objections have been voiced against pledging as being unscriptural, but the foregoing passages refute any such ideas. Frequently the objection registered is due to an incorrect defining of terms or a misunderstanding of God's teaching on the subject. Let us investigate the scriptures and determine what God wills in the matter.

The precedent for promising is set by God himself, as found in many instances in the Bible. Following Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, God promised: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). Again when Noah had gone forth from the Ark and had taken the beasts and the fowls therefrom he offered a burnt offering upon the altar, "and the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;

neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done" (Genesis 8:21). When God commanded Abram to "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee," he made a promise which has extended through the ages, when he said, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:2, 3). One of the greatest fetes in Old Testament history is God's leading of His people out of Egyptian bondage. This exodus had its beginning in the promise that He made to Moses and which resulted in the deliverance of His people from the land of oppression to one flowing with milk and honey. "And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey . . ." (Exodus 3:8). These are but a few of God's promises to mankind, but they will serve to substantiate the contention that God does not disapprove of making promises.

Promising is not an assessment; it is not taxation, it is not paying of "church dues!" It is merely an indication that we plan, purpose or intend, unless providentially hindered, to give regularly and systematically a certain amount each week to the carrying on of the Lord's work. The elders of the church should have some idea of the amount to be given in order to plan the work of the church in an orderly and effective manner. If we are giving scripturally, we have already promised or pledged to the Lord and should not therefore hesitate to make known our intention to the church

treasurer or some one of the elders. No one need know of our purpose or promise except the Lord and this person, if we prefer it that way.

Too frequently our giving is conditioned by some influence completely foreign to God's teaching. It may be **impulsive** in opposition to God's instruction to **purpose**. The day may be beautiful, we may feel exceptionally good, the sermon may have touched us deeply, and so we feel big-hearted and give **something**. This "something" characterizes **haphazard** giving in contrast to God's instruction to **give as we have been prospered**. We reach in our pocket or handbag and finger the change and contribute a few coins. If we have no change and no checkbook is available, we may even let it pass completely. Our giving may also be **spasmodic** in violation to God's teaching that we **give regularly upon the first day of the week**. One Sunday we may give, but on the next we may take a trip and fail to contribute. Our regular contribution belongs to the home congregation and even though we may give something where we are visiting, it should be in addition to that which we have promised at home. If we are guilty of spasmodic contributions, we are responsible for the work of the church proceeding in a spasmodic fashion! The Lord must be grieved when He sees His saints give in such irreverent careless indifference. Pledging will help to correct these faults.

By purposing or promising our contributions will be greater. Once a Christian is thoroughly taught on the subject, he will desire to manifest the spirit of Christ and give liberally of that which God has given to him. In 1924 the College Church in Abilene, Texas, had a total collection of \$4,984.36. They decided to follow God's plan for giving and in 1925, by pledging, they

gave \$11,812.55. Next year it was \$16,879.09, nearly four times the original amount and in 1946, twenty years later, their contribution reached \$50,000. The first year a Dallas congregation followed this plan, only 350 of its 900 members participated in pledging. Its total contribution that year was \$24,839, of which \$19,876 was given by the 350 who pledged and \$4,963 by the other 550. In other words, the 38 percent who pledged gave 80 percent of the total, and the 62 percent who did not pledge gave only 20 percent. A Christian who counts his blessings and promises to give liberally to the Lord's work, just naturally gives more in the service of the Lord, and Christ is then honored, His work progresses and souls are saved.

In the secular world we make promises daily. We purchase items and promise to pay at a specified time—we buy a radio or car and promise to pay so much a week or month; we buy a home and pledge its payment over a period of years, yet we hesitate to promise any certain amount to the church, offering the excuse that we must first see how the Lord will prosper us. This limitation does not enter into our other considerations! We would be reluctant to suggest a business arrangement with the salesman on such a basis, but feel no chagrin in telling God we cannot promise Him anything until we have some assurance that He will do His part toward us. We seem to be able to justify pledging to everything except the church. Are we letting the luxuries of life become paramount to the needs of the church? If so, we should heed God's own words when he said: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

The church as a body makes pledges—a pledge to

pay the minister a certain sum, a pledge toward the maintenance of the building, a pledge to use certain funds in the work of the church. Any building debt is a congregational pledge. When it is scriptural for the church as a whole to pledge, can it be wrong for the individual members to do so? When it is right for the church to do something collectively, is it wrong for the members individually? The only reasonable conclusion in the light of God's Word is that it is scriptural to pledge of our material means to the Lord.

But someone may be thinking that we have overlooked the words of Jesus when he said, "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:3). Careful analysis of this scripture will show that Christ was not referring specifically in this passage to the contributing of our means, but was giving his hearers a lesson in humility and warning against doing their good deeds for the purpose of being seen of men to receive their praise. We must not distort the scriptures to justify a position we wish to defend. On the other hand Paul, in an effort to encourage others to give to the ministry of the saints, cited the Corinthian church as an example of congregational pledging in advance of actual collection, thereby placing his approval upon a church so motivated.

Are books to be kept on the individual promises—NO! This answer is given not because it would be unscriptural to do so, but because the pledges are a matter between the individual and God, and He will not expect them to be fulfilled if it is impossible. When we make promises to the landlord, the salesman, the banker or the merchant, we are not allowed the privilege of saying, "if the Lord wills." God is more patient and ac-

cepts our promises with the understanding that when we purpose or promise we do so with the reservation that it will be accomplished, "if the Lord wills and so prospers us in the future as in the past." God knows whether we are able and is long suffering should calamity or inability overtake us.

If we but follow Christ's teaching in this respect, we have His promise that He will help us meet these pledges, for he has said: "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." "And he that supplieth seed to the sower and bread for food, shall supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the fruits of your righteousness" (II Corinthians 9:6, 8, 10). The wisest of all Old Testament characters tells us that "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse" (Proverbs 28:27). "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psalms 37:25). God tells us plainly that if we give liberally, cheerfully, as we have been prospered, He will make us able to give more, and that He will supply and multiply our seed. If we would but remember that everything we have belongs to the Lord, that we are merely his stewards on earth, perhaps we would more readily follow His teaching.

"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." I Timothy 6:7, 8.

Our giving is not predicated upon God's need of our

gift, for He is rich in houses and lands and holds the wealth of the world in His hands; the cattle on a thousand hills are His. "For the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (I Corinthians 10:26). "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath and all things" (Acts 17:24, 25).

Then we may ask why should we give—the Lord does not need our gifts? God wants us to give for the benefit we personally derive from the giving; for the love it creates in our hearts for others; and that through our giving we may bring the Word of Life to all nations. God gave to mankind the most precious gift of all ages when He sent His only Son to earth to die that the world might be saved. By sacrificing Christ for the sins of others, God has exemplified the true spirit of giving in the most profound manner comprehensible to man. Our love for Christ can be demonstrated by liberal and cheerful giving to His church.

Be it said to our shame the response of some Christians would leave the distinct impression on those unfamiliar with the Bible that the teaching on this subject is very meager. In reality, we find more scriptures dealing directly with the necessity for and the method of giving than we find specifically teaching the plan of salvation. It has been said that we give little when we give of our possessions, but when we give of ourselves we truly give. It naturally follows, however, that when we give of ourselves, we gladly give of our possessions also. Then the question logically arises—how much should we give?

That is a question that cannot be answered in dog-

matic terms and still be applicable to each individual, for it is strictly a personal matter. Let us turn to the Bible for information. Jacob, a man of God in the Old Testament, pledged a **tenth** to the Lord:

“And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.” Genesis 28:20-22.

The Jews were required by God to give a tenth of everything they made:

“And all the tithe of the land whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s: it is holy unto the Lord. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord.” Leviticus 27:30-32.

“Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” Malachi 3:7-10.

There were three types of tithes binding upon the people: (1) to the Levites for their maintenance (Numbers 27:26, 27); (2) for the Lord's feasts and sacrifices to be eaten (Deuteronomy 14:23-25); and (3) every third year a tithe for the poor, to be eaten in their own dwellings (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29). With these tithes and special gifts the Jews gave about one-third of all they made to the service of God—yet when obeying and following Him they were the most prosperous people the world has ever known.

In the New Testament neither the Savior nor His apostles have mentioned any specified amount. We are merely told to purpose in our hearts as we have been prospered. We find an instance, however, where the widow gave all she had and was blessed for it:

“And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow and she threw in two mites, which makes a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury; for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.” Mark 12:41-44.

Again Christ once instructed a rich young man to sell all he had and give to the poor. We are not advocating this as a criterion, or saying it is necessary to give all in order to inherit eternal life, but if we are giving of our abundance only or trusting in our earthly possessions, the lesson is applicable to us.

Even the Government recognizes man's responsibility in giving and permits a 15 percent deduction from his income for benevolent gifts to religious and edu-

cational institutions. If the Jew, whose responsibility was limited to the Israelites only, was commanded to give a tenth and actually gave three times that much, will the same God who placed upon us the responsibility of preaching the gospel to **all the world** be satisfied with less than a tenth? The citizens of this country cheerfully contribute the 15 percent allowable to charitable institutions—are we as citizens of God's Kingdom as liberal in the amount we give the church? Can we who are described by Christ himself as the "light of the world" let those who do not even profess to be Sons of God set the example in giving? We should pray earnestly and zealously that we may truly purpose as God would have us do for the edifying of our souls and the saving of others.

It is difficult to understand why we are so reluctant to give, since we profit nothing by refusing to accept God's plan for giving. We consider ourselves intelligent human beings and yet we let one of God's most important lessons pass unheeded. Planted deep within each of us is the law of self-preservation. We are willing to take any measure to protect ourselves and those we love from physical danger, yet we show so little concern about spiritual safety. Our temporal blessings we gladly share in the belief we are expressing our love by supplying the baubles of the world, but the most precious gift of all we fail to give. All the riches of this world are of no avail if we fail to reach heaven. "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul" (Mark 8:36) ?

Knowing man's love for money and its resultant danger, God sounded a sharp warning when he said:

**"But they that will be rich fall into temptation
and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful**

lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." I Timothy 6:9, 10.

"Verily, I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of heaven; and again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Matthew 19:23, 24.

Confirmation of this statement is found in the story of Lazarus and the rich man who died and was buried:

"And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." Luke 16:23, 24.

Came then the bitter realization of his folly, for between his abode and that of Lazarus existed an impassable gulf that no amount of money could bridge. For the first time he became concerned about the spiritual welfare of his loved ones as evidenced by his plea:

"I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Luke 16:27, 28.

His anxiety came too late. Had he heeded God's teaching he would not only have saved his own soul, but perhaps those of the ones he loved. Christ pleads with us to give that which we have here on earth in order that we may have treasure in heaven:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor dust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21.

We could hope for no greater insurance than this promise of God. Why then hold tenaciously to the fleeting treasures of earth, why be concerned about the exact amount required of us, when by surrendering to God’s way and doing His work joy will be ours on earth and riches beyond compare in heaven?

“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come that they may lay hold on eternal life.” I Timothy 6:17-19.

As members of Christ’s church it is our sacred privilege to perpetuate this divine organization not only by faithful adherence to its teachings, but by financial support to its work. This can be accomplished by following God’s plan, for it is universal in its application, renders the greatest satisfaction, involves the least risk and pays the highest dividend!

We had better start giving to God as He is giving to us, else He start giving to us, as we are giving to Him.

God was willing to give **His son**; Jesus was willing to give **His life**; are we willing to give **our means** that the church may fulfill its mission? May God help us to live worthy of His name and so administer the affairs

of His Kingdom that we may receive that highest of commendations:

“Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Matthew 25:21.

LIVELY STONES FITLY JOINED TOGETHER

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:15-18.

This prophetic announcement by Christ with reference to the establishment of His church is further augmented by His instructions to the apostles just before His ascension:

“And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence . . . But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Acts 1:4, 5, 8.

It was on the day of Pentecost that this prophecy was fulfilled and Christ’s church came into existence. (Acts 2.) From its inception, Christ became its head and chief corner stone.

“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning of the firstborn from the

dead; that in all things we might have the preeminence." Colossians 1:18.

"And hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Ephesians 1:22, 23.

"Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, behold I lay in Sion, a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious, but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner." I Peter 2:6-7.

"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes?" Matthew 21:42.

As head of the church which He purchased with His own blood, Christ adds to it daily "such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47.) Those whom He adds become members of His Body and lively stones in His spiritual house:

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also in Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body; whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit, for the body is not one member but many." I Corinthians 12:12-14.

"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." I Corinthians 12:27.

"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and

every one members one of another.” Romans 12:4, 5.

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” I Peter 2:5.

Having established His church, Christ instructed the apostles, through the Holy Spirit, as to the organizational pattern to be used in its government. He ordained that elders and deacons be appointed in each church—men who measure up to the divine qualifications for such an office—with specific duties assigned to them in the carrying out of the Lord’s work:

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” I Timothy 3:2-7.

“Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon being found blameless . . . Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” I Timothy 3:8-13.

Again through the Holy Spirit, Christ makes known the responsibility of the church offices as they govern His church and the manner in which the members should accept their authority:

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Acts 20:28.

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.” I Timothy 5:17.

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” Hebrews 13:7.

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” Hebrews 13:17.

According to Paul, not all members of His Body are to function in the same manner, for:

“He gave some apostles, and some prophets; and some evangelists: and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13.

But we know that it is God’s desire that the elders in His church should rule over the members of His Body, the deacons should serve and administer to the wants of the saints, and the members should work individ-

ually and collectively with the church officers and the preacher in the saving of souls and in the carrying out of the Lord's commands. The relationship that should exist between the various members of Christ's body and the spirit that should be manifested cannot be better expressed than in the words of the apostle to the brethren in Rome when he said:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another; not slothful in business; frevent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which perse-

cute you; bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good." Romans 12.

The churches established by the apostles in New Testament times were each governed by God's scriptural plan and that same plan is binding upon the church today. As proof of its applicability in this generation, let us see how it has functioned in a particular congregation. There are many churches that could be used as an example, but since my home congregation is the one with which I am best acquainted and about which I can speak with the greatest authority, I hope, by a recital of a few facts concerning the Central Church in Cleburne, Texas, to illustrate how these principles of church government operate in a scripturally organized church to the glory of God and the broadening of His Kingdom.

The church in Cleburne, Texas, was established in 1890 by a group of 10 Christians, who desired to worship according to the New Testament order. Their first meeting place was in a private home. Many trials were encountered by these devout Christians, but with an abiding faith and God's help they grew in strength and

when I became a member of the congregation in March, 1911, they had been able to provide a good church building and were supporting a full time minister, the late Brother W. K. Rose.

In 1917 a more adequate building was erected and paid for in the same year. It was in 1918 that the late Brother G. Dallas Smith came to labor with the congregation as its minister. Through his efforts and timely teaching the saints in Cleburne learned the fundamental truth that to save ourselves, we must save others by preaching the gospel. As a result we became missionary minded and instituted the budget plan that we might carry out this objective more effectively.

Because of our sincere desire to help others, it became our goal to use 50 percent of the contribution for local work and the other 50 percent for missionary efforts, with the idea of spending as much in helping others to know and understand Christ, as we were spending on our local work. Some years ago the realization of that goal was achieved and even surpassed. At times we have spent as much as 70 per cent of the church income in efforts outside the local congregation.

Believing we could better reach those with whom we were most closely associated, our first move in this direction was the employing of a county missionary who worked under the eldership of the Cleburne Church. This man established congregations or assisted the smaller congregations within this and the adjoining counties, building them up in the most holy faith. Even to this day, more preaching is done by this church in our own and adjoining counties than any other one locality.

Seeing the results accomplished by this work, the Cleburne congregation became vitally interested in sav-

ing souls in other sections of the county. Some of the places within the United States where they have actively participated include: Pocatello, Idaho; Billings and Kalispell, Montana; Canyon City, Cortez, Dolores, Durango, Leadville, Grand Junction and Pleasant View, Colorado; Clarksdale and Cottonwood, Arizona; Centralia, Washington; Niagara Falls, New York; Sunbury, Pennsylvania and Greenville, South Carolina.

In keeping with God's command to preach to all nations, we partially supported Brother Weaver when he was located in Hawaii and in conjunction with other churches, we financed Brother Hudson's work in England. For years before the last world war, we sponsored a member of our congregation as a missionary in Japan and since the war Sister Hettie Lee Ewing has once more returned to that country where she teaches hundreds of Japanese women and children the way of life. At present we are trying to extend the borders of His Kingdom by supporting men in Africa and the Panama Canal Zone. More than a score of preachers of the gospel in the United States and eight men in foreign lands have received their whole or partial support from the Central congregation.

Assistance has been given the colored brethren both in Cleburne and Cameron, Texas, in the obtaining of a church building and in other phases of their work. The first general meeting of Christians that has now resulted in the opening of Southern Bible Institute, was held at the Central Church in Cleburne, and one of its members is on the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors. This institute was established for the purpose of teaching the colored brethren the Bible and related subjects that will prepare them to preach the

gospel to their race throughout the country where the call is so urgent.

Benevolent work has been carried on for many years by way of regular aid to the Boles Orphan Home, Quinlin, Texas; the Tipton Orphan's Home in Tipton, Oklahoma, and in late years to the Sunny Glenn Home in San Benito, Texas. Also in the last few years much charitable work has taken the form of relief packages sent to more than 100 families in Greece and a large number in Germany and Japan.

Various amounts have been contributed by the congregation to assist in the building or buying of church houses in many places. The most recent contribution to work of that nature was \$1000 pledged to the 14th Street Church in Washington, D. C., to help build a commodious building in the Nation's capital. It was our privilege to assist in buying the first building to be used as a meeting place for the saints in Massachusetts and currently we are contributing toward the first building to be purchased in Rhode Island.

In addition, much work has been accomplished through the radio and press activities of the congregation. Radio broadcasts at some of the mission points, as well as in our town have proven most beneficial. At present our outstanding work in this respect is the supervising of the Lorenque Marques Broadcast in Portugese East Africa. This station, owned by the British government, but operated in Portugese territory, is one of the largest and most powerful stations in the world, with a listening audience of more than a million. The transcriptions for a series of gospel sermons entitled "Back to the Bible" are made by our local preacher. We are joined in this fine activity by

the congregations in Birdville, Childress, Ferris and Vernon, Texas, and Athens, Alabama.

Believing the mission work in the Northwest section of the United States would be benefitted by the distribution of the Rocky Mountain Christian paper, we sent financial support to that publication for several years. The church has also been instrumental in the publishing and distributing to all parts of the world more than a quarter million tracts dealing with vital scriptural teachings. For years our local minister has written a column in the Daily paper entitled "Food for Thought." The teaching presented in this column has been a source of comment and provoked much thought as evidenced by the letters received from persons locally as well as outside the State.

Eight regular preachers—local men who began as boys in our congregation—have gone out from this church and are accomplishing much for the Lord. These men are: M. L. Daniel, Glen Rose, Texas; Vernon Gahagan, Greenville, Texas; Roy Howell, Medill, Oklahoma; Leslie L. Jamison, Ennis, Texas; James Johnson, Midlothian, Texas; Jack King, Bonham, Texas; B. C. McCarley, Houston, Texas; and Paul Southern, now of the Abilene Christian College Bible Department. G. W. Knee, a student in Abilene Christian College, but preaching regularly each Sunday, is a current member of our congregation.

In addition, there is in the church at present three men who hold themselves in readiness to go to neighboring fields to preach the gospel whenever they are needed. An outstanding number of former members of the congregation have been selected as elders and deacons in other localities and have served honorably and well to the glory of God.

When our present preacher came to Cleburne, some five years ago, he was the only preacher of the church in the county. Now we have 14 congregations that have regular preaching every Lord's Day.

A regular business meeting of the officers is held twice a month and is attended by the elders, deacons, the preacher (if he is not otherwise engaged), a few specially invited men whom we feel could be helpful in the particular business under consideration, and any of the members who care to attend. One of the elders presides as Chairman and one of the deacons maintains accurate records of the proceedings which are kept on file. One of the officers acts as the treasurer for the local funds, but we have separate treasurers for the handling of the South African and Canal Zone work, since we cooperate with other congregations in these activities and their contributions are sent to us for distribution.

Our meeting is opened with a prayer for guidance in the handling of the affairs of the Lord's work and a Christian spirit is manifested throughout the meeting. Many items of business are brought to our attention—appeals of various kinds from many sections of the country. All are read and considered and although it is impossible to respond to each, we make a determined effort to assist those we believe most meritorious to the extent of our ability. Reports are read from those working in our mission fields and any need, physical or spiritual of these congregations or of our local congregation, is discussed and acted upon.

We realize that we fall far short in many respects and fail to grasp all our opportunities, but by endeavoring to function just as God has ordained, by manifesting a spirit of love and cooperation and by trusting in

God, we have been able to accomplish the work outlined. It is our prayer that we may grow in grace and knowledge of the truth and may do more in the service of the Lord.

What this congregation has done others can do, and even more, but the extent to which a church can grow and develop is largely dependent upon each member's realization of his responsibility within the structure of the church. With Christ as our chief corner stone, we should build upon that spiritual foundation and become lively stones fitly joined together that the steadfastness and immovableness of the church may be made known to all the world.

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:14-16.

