



he also uses it of appointed leaders to whom care of the flock has been “entrusted” (1 Pet. 5:3). One may be an older Christian without meeting the qualifications of an appointed elder (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:3-9). There is clearly a special role of service and leadership given to those appointed as elders over a local church.

ferred to in Scripture. There is the church in a universal sense (Matt. 16:18), and a congregation in a specific place (1 Cor. 1:2). Yet, there is also such a thing as a local church actually assembled. It is in this context that a woman is to keep silent (1 Cor. 14:34-35), the sin of an unrepentant member is to be brought before the church (Matt. 18: 17), and the Lord’s Supper is observed “when you come together as a church” (1 Cor. 11:18). We may be members of the Lord’s church universally and yet not be assembled “as a church.” It is true that Peter uses the term “elders” in a general sense of older Christians (1 Pet. 5:5), but

Conclusion. To follow the teachings of the New Testament we must reject such extreme views of the authority given to the elders of a local church. We must trust in the wisdom of God as it pertains to this most important position of leadership. The Bible clearly gives to the elders limited authority within the bounds of God’s word. The fact that elders who sin are to be rebuked shows that their authority is constrained by Scripture (1 Tim. 5:20). The authority of the elders is limited to the local congregation (Acts 14:23;11:27-30). While all Christians can teach and encourage brethren where ever they may be found this does not extend to oversight, control, manipulation, or domination of saints in other congregations. It is denominational and unauthorized no matter what its motive. Further, the responsibility of members to submit to the elders of a congregation, is secondary to the responsibility to submit to God. In matters of faith it is the responsibility of the congregation to obey God, even if an eldership should do otherwise (Rom. 10:17). However, in matters of judgment it is the duty of the congregation to submit to the eldership (Heb. 13:17). The Christian who refuses to demonstrate appropriate respect, obedience, and submission to the elders of a congregation, rejects the authority of God.



Faithful Sayings Issue 12.8 February 21, 2010

Welcome Visitors

We are so glad that you joined us today.
Please come again.

ISSUE

12.8

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

February 21
2010

Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Ken Ford
Charles Kelley
Pat Ledbetter

Deacons:

Dean Bowers
Eddie Cook
Pat Goguen
Neil Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Rusty Scott

Evangelists:

Kyle Pope
Curtis Carwile



The Authority of the Eldership

by Kyle Pope

After Paul had established churches in Pisidia and Pamphylia Scripture tells us that he passed through the region again and “appointed elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). Throughout church history man has often departed from this simple pattern of leadership. The denominational world long ago rejected biblical organization for the church to follow its own imagination. Recent years have seen a number of issues arise among those once counted as brethren which call upon us to examine carefully the nature of the authority the Lord has given to elders of a local church. These issues demonstrate some extreme views of the authority of the eldership.

The Expansion of Authority

Absolute Submission. In the middle of the twentieth century controversy arose among churches of Christ over whether or not the Bible authorizes the church to support human institutions. There are certainly many institutions which men have created which are good and worthwhile. The question is, are all good works, works of the church? The pattern revealed in Scripture shows the New Testament church offering support for those who preach (1 Cor. 9:14), elders who labor in the word (1 Tim. 5:17-18), qualified widows (1 Tim. 5:3-16), and support to relieve needy saints (Acts 11:27-29). However, there is no example of the church supporting schools, hospitals,

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family life centers, camps, children or senior homes, or any human institution. If something is the work of the church, the church must do it. If something is not the work of the church, the church cannot support it.

In spite of this, the elders in many congregations in the United States chose to send money from the collection to human institutions. This placed members in an untenable situation. If they were to submit to the decision of the eldership, they would be participating in that which was unauthorized. If they with-



Olsen Park church of Christ

held their contribution they were disobeying the command of God (1 Cor. 16:1-2). While some chose rightly to withdraw from such congregations, others imagined that the authority of the eldership was such that the members must submit regardless of whether its actions were authorized in Scripture. They concluded that the elders would answer for their choices, but the members were simply to submit.

Expanded Oversight. Good intentions and new opportunities often lead to unexpected consequences. This has happen to brethren in matters of evangelism. Brethren have gone into foreign fields and encountered impoverished prospects for the gospel. In response to this two things have happened in some cases. First, churches have assumed full-support of an evangelist in a foreign field. This is certainly an authorized work of the church (Phil. 4:15-16). Second, congregations have paid to have church buildings built for foreign churches. While relief of needy saints is certainly authorized, the building of a place of worship has seen some American elderships retain the deed to another church's building. If the foreign church did not follow the wishes of the American church, the preacher was no longer supported and the property is seized. All the while these brethren may have claimed to advocate the New Testament pattern of congregational autonomy, while practicing oversight of another congregation.

The "Mother Church" Concept. A dramatic example of this expansion of oversight was seen in this country in an evangelistic effort which began in Gainesville Florida. One congregation began to act as a type of "mother church" to establish and oversee other congregations. Once known as the "Crossroads Movement," this effort expanded into Boston to the point that elders in Boston assumed oversight and control of churches they had established in the entire eastern section of the country. While in the past churches of Christ would have immediately recognized the denominational error of such expansion, the goal of evangelism seemed so worthwhile that people were willing to overlook this. Gordon Ferguson,

in an article advocating this view claimed, "one real hindrance to brotherhood unity has been an ungodly view of church autonomy." He argued that church autonomy "guaranteed that the world will never be evangelized" and thus he concluded that autonomy is "contrary to the very purpose of God and is sinful" (*Boston Bulletin*, "Progressive Revelation," Part 4, June 5, 1988).

The Denial of Authority

In reaction to extreme expansions of the authority of the eldership or cases of abuse of authority, others have virtually denied that elders have any authority at all. In so doing members take positions which are just as extreme in the opposite direction. Consider two examples:

"Elders have no authority." There are some very subtle ways that members can essentially deny any authority to the eldership. Members may refuse to consult elders in time of need. If members doubt that God has entrusted elders with authority, they may go to the preacher, or other members for help but refuse to consult the elders. Others may convince themselves that it is not necessary to submit to the elders. As a result, when elders ask them to do something, or set times of worship and Bible study, these members take the request lightly or imagine that they don't have to be at every service. This reflects a rejection of authority.

In other cases members may pressure elders to act only with the approval of the congregation as a whole. Recent years have seen more congregations making decisions only when the congregation as a whole meets to offer approval. It is one thing for elders to get feedback from a congregation, or to take steps to improve communication, but brethren minimize and deny the God-given role of leadership by the elders when they insist upon action by consensus rather than

submission to the godly judgment of spiritually mature shepherds of the flock.

"There is no such thing as an appointed 'eldership.'"

In January 1986 Charles Holt, who once forcefully taught against institutionalism, began publishing a paper known as *The Examiner*. Within this paper Holt advocated two positions. First, he argued that the only organization in Christ is the individual. According to his view, the idea of local independent congregations is a man-made concept. He felt that anytime Christians are together they are a "church." Second, he argued that elders are simply older Christians, and not appointed positions over a local congregation. He wrote, "you do not, can not, make someone an 'elder' by ordination or appointment. Yet, in the modern Church of Christ that is what we claim to do" (from *Destructive Heresies*, by Earl Kimbrough).

There are certainly different ways that the church is re-