ELDERSHIP

G.W. North

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The text

This edition is based on the texts of Mr North's books which first appeared on the website of Lanark Christian Fellowship many years ago.

We have exercised as much care as possible in the conversion into this format, but if you are aware of any errors, could you please let us know.

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Preface

This pamphlet makes no pretensions to be an exhaustive study of this subject. Rather is it an attempt to present a scriptural and spiritual ground on which to build a right concept of this truth in relation to present need in the churches. This will be done with four things in mind: (1) Origins, (2) Historical development, (3) Church function, (4) Observations and suggestions.

1 — THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

In course of his invaluable prophecy, Daniel at one point calls God by a most significant name — "the Ancient of Days'. It is a name which would have been full of meaning to those who first heard or read the prophecy. The work was written in Chaldee, the language of heathen Babylon. Daniel was held captive and came to fame there. God was unknown. None of the Babylonians knew the wondrous names and titles by which the one True God had in past days revealed Himself to Israel through their patriarchs and saints.

For this reason these people could not be expected to know Him; but ignorant though they were of those things, they did understand the truth and principle of eldership. Therefore when Daniel spoke of

'the Ancient of Days', a fact of life, a concept of truth and a principle of rightness immediately presented itself to their minds. Especially was this so because when using the title the prophet was speaking in terms of judgment; if judgment there is to be, who is better able to judge between, or be fairer to people than one who is THE ANCIENT OF DAYS?

To the heathen mind, the title would have implied death-defying longevity, unchallenged seniority, complete knowledge, highest wisdom, perfect understanding, unparalleled strength, absolute ability. In short, such a person would be regarded by the Babylonians as being fully equipped with ultimate supreme ability to judge aright. What the man of God was doing was more than acquainting his captors with facts; he was informing them of

eternal truth in a form understandable to their minds and acceptable to their spirits.

None of God's names can fully describe Him. He is greater than all His names; they are a means of self-revelation, an adaptation implying an application of Himself to human minds and conditions and needs, according to His will. 'Ancient of Days' is a name by which He describes Himself, having special reference to the fact that He is the Original Father and Elder. The origins and roots of eldership are in God.

John, the holy seer of the New Testament, says that upon a certain occasion he was called up through an open door into heaven. He records for the churches what he then saw and heard there, that by the revelation they might shine the better in this dark world. First he saw the throne, and one sat on it, he says: it and He were encircled by a

rainbow. Then he proceeds to mention in order twenty four seated elders, seven lamps of fire, a sea of glass and four mysterious beasts in and around the throne.

Whether heaven and God's throne and these things have always been set out in this order no-one knows; what we do know is that the persons seen and mentioned next in order to God in the vision are elders. John's revelation in fullness is fairly comprehensive: Cherubim and Seraphim, six-winged creatures, angels and archangels, the angel of the Lord, and numerous others of higher order and greater power than man are all in it, but these are not yet seen or brought into the picture.

God's reasons for making this specific revelation known are not fully given; what God showed John was the present layout of the seat of imperial majesty in heaven. We

have been granted a sight of the centre of universal government in relationship to the eternal covenant of redemption made by God through the Lamb and His blood.

God is pictured seated upon His throne in the centre of the complete rainbow, emerald in colour. By this He is declaring Himself to be unchanging in His being, immovable in His will and eternal in His purpose. Around Him is assembled the council of elders. They are not His counsellors; they are there to receive His counsels. Like their God and Creator and Counsellor, they are seated; they are at rest. They never leave their position, they have no need; the seven spirits of God wait before the throne, perfectly prepared to move out at His will and word to ensure that His purposes are accomplished exactly as He wishes. Other spirits move, but the elders abide at the

throne. Who or what these seven spirits are we are not told. John represents them as lamps of fire; they are spirits of burning light.

Then the vast expanse of the sea of glass is brought into view, stretching crystal-clear before the throne. The inscrutable face of the one like jasper, and the seven fiery spirits look down and out across the sea, which at that time was empty of life. Lastly the four living creatures are shown hovering in and around the throne. These beings are diverse of form and face, but alike in perception, for each is full of eyes before and behind and within. With foresight, hindsight and insight, beholding all that transpires in and around the throne, without ceasing they say 'holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come'. And when for a moment they pause from

this, their unending confession, and give honour and thanks to Him whom they behold, the elders in acknowledgment and total agreement fall from their seats, crowns in hand, to cast them before the throne.

There is no crown upon the head of the one like jasper; He who creates and bestows crowns wears none. They are but symbols, tokens of His favour bestowed because they are deserved, but in this context they are a mark of inferiority. He is too honourable and noble to need tokens of royal virtues. He receives neither reward nor award; His is eternal majesty; He is above all. They say 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power', but He created all these things, and themselves also, for His own pleasure. They know that of course and say so, but they also understand that He has no need for crowns; He is The Crown. They

cast their crowns upon the crystal sea at His feet before His face, but He gives them back again. Upon their heads and at His feet they are right, but not upon His brow; none can crown Him, but all heaven must worship.

John has given us a glimpse into heaven, revealing how things were with God in the beginning when He commenced His work within the terms of an eternal covenant to bring forth unto Himself a special people for His purposes in the regeneration. In process of accomplishing this, His work would be cosmic; it would affect the whole universe, but His main purpose was to fill the vast area of the mysterious sea with redeemed and regenerate men. It is not therefore surprising that before John's eyes there appears in the midst of the bow-encircled throne a young lamb as it had been slain. Immediately John's ears are filled with cries

and songs coming from everywhere rising from the lips of myriads upon myriads of creatures — the whole universe is praising the Lamb. Little is told us of events before this, but everything now moves forward from this point.

By this heavenly vision God has introduced us to the original company of elders. They were created of the Ancient of Days to be part of the heavenly order, and from the beginning have been in direct touch and intimate association with God and the Lamb. We have also been shown: (1) their position — next to the throne; (2) their disposition — around the throne; (3) their exaltation — they are seated and crowned; (4) their preoccupation — worship; (5) their function — to present the prayers of the saints to God; (6) the reason for their being — the purposes of God in redemption, with special

reference to regeneration; (7) their subordination — they cast their crowns before the throne.

2 — THE CIVIL AND THE SPIRITUAL

Because the elders were created by God in the beginning, it is inevitable that they should have a fundamental place in the structure of human society. As we have seen from Daniel's prophecy, man's mind naturally associates wisdom and knowledge with age. Length of life enables man to gain true perspective and become emotionally mature and mentally stable. Time proves all things, and for youth it lies yet in the future. Those who have lived longest have seen and endured the most, and are therefore better able to form correct judgments.

It is therefore natural in the affairs of men that experience of life should be highly esteemed and seniority greatly respected. For this reason, from time immemorial, wherever families and tribes and nations

have existed, rule by elders has been the accepted form of government, and is to this day. It is the most primitive, simple and uncomplicated form of government known to man, and to it every normal person agrees and willingly submits.

Even among the more civilized nations, youth submits to age. For instance, seldom is the position of national premiership given to a young man, and our judges, for obvious reasons, are always chosen from men who could be regarded as the elders of our society. We still hear the phrase 'the city fathers', and understand perfectly what it means.

In countries that have royal families at their head, whose sons and daughters accede to sovereignty upon the death of their parents, seniority is of great importance. Normally the eldest son succeeds to the throne.

Should he be a minor at the time, a regent is appointed to guide the affairs of state until he comes of age. Even so, whoever he be, he is surrounded by privy counsellors, ministers of state and others who, if they are not themselves aged men, may consult time-honoured works of reference in order to give advice to his majesty.

The importance of this is revealed by the tragic incident which occurred early in the history of Israel's kings. The kingdom which had been so gloriously established by Israel's second and third kings, David and Solomon, was wantonly wrecked by its fourth king, Rehoboam. Despite the fact that he was the son of the wisest and richest man on earth, Rehoboam behaved so stupidly that he caused irreparable harm to the nation. It was over the matter of taxes, and happened because he refused to abide by the counsel

of the elders of Israel. Rejecting the word of men who had lived in the reign of his illustrious father, he acted upon the advice of young men of his own generation. This sparked off a revolt led by Jeroboam, a former house-servant, and the outcome was civil war.

The nation was split from that very day, and from then until now has never recovered from it. Rehoboam's folly is written upon the pages of history — it is one of the most tragic examples of the terrible results which may easily occur when a man ignores the natural structure of human society and refuses to acknowledge government by eldership. We may be sure that since God set the pattern of eldership when creating heavenly structures of government, it is impossible to depart from it and prosper.

However, interesting though these things may be, we are more concerned here with the historical development of spiritual rather than civil rule by elders. God revealed His will about this in a very clear way to Israel by anointing seventy men at once to become elders with Moses. He did so when Moses complained that the task of bringing Israel to Canaan was too great a burden for him to bear alone. The privilege of selecting the men for the position was given to Moses, but it was God who made them into elders. He did it by taking of the Spirit that was upon Moses and putting it upon them, and He did so in order that thereby they should henceforth help to bear the burden of the people. Those seventy immediately became prophets also; this gift, apparently, was vital to their ministry.

This act of God was the divine provision for the need which Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had vainly tried to meet months earlier. This man had advised his son-in-law to allocate some of his duties to other men. He saw how greatly overtaxed Moses was, and taking advantage of his relationship, position and seniority, he counselled Moses to select and promote certain men of Israel to office. Jethro counselled Moses with absolute sincerity and complete wisdom according to the world, and the younger man, although he was God's chosen leader, acted upon it in good faith. However, being of man, Jethro's advice did not alleviate the real need; the problem still remained. God did not move until Moses came to the point where he saw his own wretchedness and wished to die.

The lesson we must learn from this is very plain that we should not miss it, lest missing

it we should fail. Good and sound as human heathen advice may be, worldly wisdom has no answer to the problems of God's people. Jethro's wise, fatherly advice was full of loving concern for his son-in-law; he seemed in full sympathy with him and the project so dear to Moses' heart. It rose from principles of rule embedded deeply by God in the psychology of the human race; it was therefore most natural and correct that Jethro should give it and Moses obey it; but it did not have the desired effect. Moses still came to the breaking point.

The solution to Moses' problem lay in eldership ordained of God. Jethro's advised specifications for junior leadership were fine, they were all qualities he had for a long time observed in mature Moses. Those he would choose had to be men of ability, God-fearing, men of truth, hating covetousness,

and capable of dealing with everyday matters. Moses listened to him, obeyed his voice, did what he said in all detail and let him go, doubtless thanking God for his father-in-law's visit.

This all happened within a few weeks of their leaving Egypt, and before meeting God at Sinai. It proved to be a subtle move of satan. Jethro was priest to a heathen deity; a man who himself worshipped, and trained and helped others also to worship and serve a false god. It might possibly have been he who had influenced Zipporah, his daughter, to prevent Moses from circumcising his sons, thus adding to the man of God's conflicts, while undergoing decades of endurance in the backside of the desert; we do not know. From the account in Exodus 19, it is certain that Moses tried to dissuade Jethro from returning to his evil ministry, but failed. So

we know that, despite the fact that he knew Jehovah to be the one true God, the priest of Midian returned to his idolatry. He was a man who, as the serpent in the garden in the beginning, came with fair words and good advice, but with subtle intentions.

Jethro's counsel as a worldly wise man was to look for and promote men of ability; it seemed just right. He made no stipulation about age — any man with the qualifications specified was eligible. Being an elder himself and very religious, and professing his mental conversion to Jehovah, his sage advice was very self-commending. But by it he revealed that he had forsaken the principles he thought himself to embody. What Moses had to learn, and we have to unequivocally accept and remember, is that God cannot depart from His eternal principles of life and structure of government.

Moses had yet to learn this; but because he had not previously been shown by God, and was therefore not in rebellion against Him, God dealt with him very graciously. Some months later, however, when the Children of Israel had moved but three days' journey from Sinai, the Lord engineered a circumstance in which an opportunity presented itself for Him to deal with the whole situation.

At last, under extreme pressure, the displeased Moses makes his complaint to the Lord. The Lord's response was swift and sure. Moving from eternal principles of righteousness, He speaks to bring Israel into line with the structure of government created by Him for correct administration in the universe of redemption. 'Gather unto Me seventy elders of the men of Israel, elders of the people and officers over them',

He said. Moses did so, ranging the men around the Tabernacle in a way reminiscent of the twenty-four elders seated about the throne in heaven. Then the Lord came down and took of the Spirit that was upon Moses and put it upon the elders. In other words He anointed them and ordained them into office, that they, with Moses, should bear the burden of the people of God. The seventy were elected from natural eldership to spiritual eldership, from human office to divine office. They held the first by seniority, which is by accident of birth, plus natural ability; they could only hold the second by another's deliberate choice, and by anointing with the Spirit of God.

We ought also to take note that Moses' ordering of the Children of Israel at Jethro's word took place before Sinai, that is before the Tabernacle and throne and law of God

were with them. It was a coolly calculated move on the devil's part. He succeeded in saddling the people, whom God had chosen to be His own kingdom on earth, with a satanically inspired system of government. Satan thought that if he could get the people organized under his plausible system before the Lord could give them His, he would succeed in defeating God yet.

As it was, however, the devil calculated without the people's sin and Moses' breakdown and the Lord's will and wisdom. The Lord is not slow, He worked according to principles of eternal righteousness. He did not install His elders until He had first of all established His kingdom and throne and law and house among men. Systems of government depend for their proper function upon undeviating law and eternal order: before elders, The Elder; above

government, The Governor; in the midst of the seats, The Throne.

It is possible of course that some, if not most, of the chosen seventy were of the same company which a few months before had been put to work under Jethro's scheme. If so, theirs was the privilege of learning the difference between men's election and God's, and to sorrow that they had been so misled by their betters. The joy of their present anointing, however, would have more than compensated for their sadness; the gift of prophecy God generously added with it would have comforted their hearts immeasurably. They knew that they were the elect of the elect. Others of their contemporaries were elders too, but now they had been elevated above them to a new place with God.

Before this, through the centuries, in every nation including Israel, natural elders had functioned in family matters and tribal affairs and limited governmental councils. Eldership as a natural position did not commence with these seventy, but eldership as a spiritual office did. There is a word in Hebrews 11 which throws still fuller light on the subject. Speaking of faith, the writer says 'by it the elders obtained a good report'. Then, commencing with Abel, he proceeds to name many of the great national worthies, moving right through history from the beginning of time to Jesus, the greatest of them all. Each of these was an elder of the faith, although it is to be doubted whether Abel was acknowledged as one during his lifetime. He was only third in seniority in the original Adamic family, being preceded by his father Adam and his brother

Cain. At the time of his death he was Abel the younger. He was most definitely not the elder. Adam was that, and rightly so; yet by God Abel is called an elder.

By this we see that the word elder has a variety of meanings: (1) an obvious personal meaning; (2) a simple family recognition; (3) a wider social application; (4) a national governmental function; (5) greatest of all, it is a spiritual office. This last finds its highest fulfilment in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great Elder of the Church. That is why John so dramatically presents Him standing in the midst of the throne at the centre of the rainbow, encircled by the elders. John makes no attempt to alter the fact of His youth; he uses the word signifying 'young lamb'. He died as a young man. The apostle cannot describe one recognizable feature of the Being he first saw upon the

throne — He is just there and perhaps may best be thought of as 'the Ancient of Days'. But immediately the Lamb appears he knows who He is.

Two aspects of eldership are being presented. Both persons are Elders, the one by virtue of His indescribable being and presence, the other by reason of sheer spiritual merit. He is the Son, and would normally be thought of as junior to a father, but in God the first person is spoken of as The Father, not a father as in human relationships. Likewise with Jesus, He is not a son, but The Son, as eternal as The Father and one with Him.

At His appearing the elders fall down and worship, angels sing and myriads of creature-voices ascribe to Him everything a heart could wish. In His hands He holds the book, the secret key of the future; He had

acceded to it by His death and resurrection. As it is said of Him, Jesus knew 'that all things were in His hands and that He came from God and went to God'. He said Himself, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit'. Between them, Father and Son had achieved a new position for the prosecution of world government — from this point world procedure would be different. This was statesmanship of the highest order. While still on earth He had said, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature', and now He sets the procedural order in motion.

The Man Christ Jesus is supreme; this is an inaugural occasion; everybody worships. Here the ideas of seniority, longevity and spiritual quality are combined with majesty and power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing.

This is the royal occasion and unique setting from which God inaugurates future policy and sets forth the original pattern and example of eldership.

Seeing this New Testament revelation was received following the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, it must have been given for the Church. It had not yet appeared to John; what was shown him was God's preparation for the bringing forth of the Church, and the grounds upon which it must stand. Headship and government in heaven is by eldership; it is not therefore surprising that Christ should ordain it in the Church. In all truth it could not be otherwise, for the Church is His body. Yet nowhere does the New Testament use the word 'eldership'. It speaks of elders, but there is no office or state spoken of as eldership.

The office created for elders to fill is best described by the word bishopric, or, as we would speak of it, 'see'. An elder is a bishop, an overseer or presbyter. These ideas have been taken up and formulated into systems of Church governmental order from which eventually denominations have appeared — Episcopalian, Presbyterian etc. However scriptural and high-sounding such names may be, these are quite contrary to the desires of God, and as surely as these things happen, man-made organisations develop and degenerate into death.

It is therefore of immeasurable importance that we have the right kind of man in office. Exaggeration of the importance of the office above the quality of the man who fills it is a sure way to bring the office into disgrace and disrepute. The most basic definition of an office is an action, something performed by

a person in pursuit or practice of a duty. Anyone doing it is an official in that sense. It is only when duties are defined, made exclusive to a person and incorporated into some kind of system that officialdom is magnified. Growth is then abandoned for structure, and development substituted by election.

It is a subtle switch, mostly undetected by men. The world's system of trade unionism is built upon this cruel principle. Man has not mastered the art of synthesizing election with free development based upon employment of innate ability. He has the traces of God's greatness in him, but is entirely devoid of power to implement his ideas. Being so bankrupt, he lives in a fantasy world of idealism, because he fails to promote ideas to ideals. All his seeds are rotten at the core; they bid fair and boast

fullness, but produce evil fruit and death in society. Man's offices are stereotyped representations of an evolutionary system working from an evil power foreign to God. Greed, pride, ambition, cruelty, corruption and all the aftermath of sin fill its offices. This kind of office is unknown in the true Church of Jesus Christ.

3 — THE MARKS AND THE CALLING

[1] Shepherds and Sheep

The very best description of an elder's occupation, and that which is dearest to the heart of God is overseership. This is impressed upon us by the view granted us of the eternal throne and its occupants — full of eyes before and behind and within; a Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes; all-seeing living creatures and seven seeing spirits, the Lamb with perfect sight. This is the great overseership an elder has to represent, and in part fulfill, to the church to which he is appointed.

Peter makes this clear in his first letter — 'feed the flock of God which is among you', he said to the elders, 'taking the oversight not of constraint but willingly of a ready

mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock'. Here oversight is linked with shepherding — an elder must be a shepherd.

The suggestion that leaders and people are in the sight of God as shepherds and sheep appealed to the heart of Peter greatly. He had come to a precious realisation of this. Like his friend and fellow-apostle, John, he first presents Jesus as the 'lamb without blemish and without spot', and then later also speaks of Him as 'the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls'.

Peter had learned from Jesus a very real lesson about being an under-shepherd. It happened early one morning on the seashore after he had scarcely dried himself by the fire and eaten the breakfast his Lord had prepared. Just previously he had thrown himself into the sea in a bursting desire to

get to Jesus, and now he hears Him inviting him to go walking with Him. He did not yet fully know the reasons why the Lord had called him — they lay deep in Jesus' heart soon to be revealed; He was seeking men who would shepherd His sheep. He had been smitten and they had been scattered; now the great Shepherd wanted them to be gathered and fed. 'Lovest thou me more than these?' He said; He was referring to apostleship, boats, seas, fish, friends, livelihood and life itself. 'Lovest thou Me? ..... Feed my sheep' He said.

That day Jesus finally turned Peter away from being a fisherman and made him a shepherd. For some three years he had been a rather rebellious and wayward sheep, but Jesus had gently led him on, and now the role is being changed, Peter is to be a shepherd. He knew well enough that he

could only be an under-shepherd; his Lord was Chief, but he was no hireling — 'not for filthy lucre' he said. He had once heard Jesus say, 'the hireling fleeth because he is an hireling and careth not for the sheep ..... the wolf cometh and scattereth the sheep'; he had never forgotten it. He also knew that sheep were a sacred trust from God. The prayer Jesus had prayed to His Father when on His way to betrayal and death was still fresh in his memory; 'the men thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were and thou gavest them me; I have kept them and none of them is lost but the son of perdition.'

Peter could never forget; he knew the duties of shepherding; he had learned so much about it from Jesus. 'What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them doth not leave the ninety and nine in

the wilderness and go after that which was lost until he find it? I lay down my life — the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep'. He was also very familiar with Ezekiel's critical statements full of condemnation for false and faithless shepherds, men who fed themselves, fouled the waters, and totally failed God and His sheep. He knew all that was involved in being a shepherd — every one must render account to God. 'Take the oversight', he says to the elders, 'willingly'; do not look for reward, seek only to be worthy of the crown from the Chief Shepherd when He appears. 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; all we like sheep had gone astray, we had turned every one to his own way'.

Peter could recall with what unwillingness he had first heard the Lord's appeal to his

heart requesting his love and loyalty; his response had been so disappointing to his Lord. It was not that he had not wanted to respond to Jesus' wishes, but he had made such a mess of things. True, Jesus had restored him from his misery. He thought he had meant it when he said, 'I will lay down my life for thy sake', but he had not known his own heart. Could he ever trust himself again? Still the persistent Shepherd pleaded with him for the sheep: 'Lovest thou Me? Feed my sheep, feed my lambs'. No longer could he resist that loving heart and tender pleading voice; at last he believed in His faith in him. How faithful Jesus was: Peter capitulated right into that shepherd heart: 'Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee'.

He thought he had known better than the Shepherd when He had said to him, 'Where I

go thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards'. Memories sweet and bitter filled his mind with problems he could not solve, but Jesus knew; He had understood. That was evident at the time, for He had said, 'Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in Me'. He knew all things; He knew all about his failures, his boasts, his longings, the unforgettable scene in the judgment hall when he had denied and disowned Him. Oh, the bitterness of it all! How could Jesus still want him? How could He ever trust him again? But He who knew all things loved him. This was Peter's greatest discovery that day.

Strange as it may seem, Peter had never ceased to love Him, and Jesus knew it. Bless this dear Shepherd, who at last drew the true confession from his breaking heart,

'Thou knowest that I love thee'. He had been afraid to say so because of his faithlessness. But faithful Jesus knew that he loved Him; He knew Peter better than he knew himself. The greatest revelation Peter ever had was what his friend John later put into writing, 'God is Love'.

The discovery of love itself — what it is, what it will do, the lengths to which it will go, and the ill-treatment it will put up with uncomplaining, the abuse it will take, its strength, its endurance, its consistency, its unbreakable resolve, its patience, its tenderness, its understanding and silence, its healing, its saving, restoring, reconciliatory grace — is greater than to know its purpose. Knowing that God loved him was not the end of Peter's discoveries; it was the beginning. That day Peter found Love as a result of Love finding him. Love is

greater than its ends and means. That is why it adapts to itself means and achieves its ends. Calvary was one of those achievements, the greatest, but it was only one of its ends — a demonstration of Love.

By Love's means we at last discover Love itself. What Peter finally discovered was that nothing he had done had altered Jesus' love one jot or tittle. Love revealed to a greater degree, to a greater number, does not increase it. Love says, 'no matter what you have said or done, I understand'. But Lord, I've cursed thee, denied thee, betrayed thee, hurt thee, disregarded thee, helped those who crucified thee, I've misunderstood thee, acted contrary to thee, contradicted thee, refused to believe thee, mocked, starved, stripped and made thee naked; how canst thou love me?' 'I am Love'.

Love at last reached love and love responded to Love. Peter became a lover and was immediately made a shepherd. The only food fit for sheep and lambs is love; people can only feed on love to Jesus. A shepherd must realize that pasture for sheep is nothing other than a product of Jesus' love to him and his personal love to the Lord. In effect Jesus said 'love Me and thereby feed others'. This is the foremost task of elders.

Primarily overseership is of the flock; it is the most spiritual of callings, and can only be properly discharged if the heart is love. A man must never forget that however great his privilege in being made an elder and a shepherd, he is still only a sheep himself. 'Follow thou me', said Jesus. At that time Peter was too concerned about what a fellow apostle was to do. To follow the Lord takes all a man's concentrated powers. He

cannot afford to miss one of His words or looks or gestures. Following and listening, Peter heard the Lord. say something which was to set the tone for all his subsequent living and ministry, 'another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not' To hear and receive such a prophecy and live by it requires uttermost devotion, for the Lord was informing him of his death. The Lord was really saying 'love Me, feed my sheep, follow Me and lay down your life for Me; if you will do this you will also lay down your life for the sheep.

A shepherd, of all people, must learn that he is accounted as a sheep for the slaughter, and for His sake 'be killed all the day long' in the hearts and intentions of God's enemies. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, became the greatest of all shepherds because He was God's Lamb. To be really a great shepherd, a

man must be a sheep for sacrifice. Jesus did not become the Great Shepherd of the sheep because He was raised from the dead. The resurrection did not make Him great; He was raised because He was great. He did not become the Lamb by being sacrificed, He was sacrificed because He was the Lamb. He so lived that He had to be sacrificed. He had to be killed because of the life He lived.

What Jesus was saying to Peter was 'so live that you too, as I, shall be girded and carried off to your death; but Peter, unless you love Me, devote yourself to feeding my sheep and lambs, and follow Me yourself, it can never happen. Be a lamb all your life and you will become the lamb at the end'.

It is significant that the Lord was not called the Great Shepherd until He was brought again from the dead. His greatness lay in this — He faithfully led on when the wolves

came to scatter the flock, even though it meant certain death to do so. His first concern was not for the flock, although He loved those His Father had given Him. He plainly told them that He loved the Father, He was going to Gethsemane and Golgotha because of it. He gave His Father the first love of His heart; He knew He had the first love of His Father's heart. If it be true, and it is, that Calvary was accomplished by love, it is also as true that it was all done in and because of this love. He was great enough to remain true to original love, that on earth it may be revealed as first love. It was this that gave redemptive value to His blood — all He did was imbued with everything in Him — perfect love.

The flock was scattered. He cared deeply about them and what would happen to them, but He knew His Father was

overruling all and would see to that. His greater concern was to do His Father's will and leave the flock in God's hands. Failing that, all He could do would be vain; His duty was to set these men the perfect example of good shepherding. It may only be a secondary reason for so strongly setting His course to do His Father's will, but it was as vital as any reason He knew. His first and greatest reason for going to the cross was Love, original love, first love, perfected with (or by) Him as a man. Therefore every single thing He did was as much an expression of love as were His sufferings and death.

Elders must take special and hearty note of this; nobody is fit to be an overseer of a flock except he is cast in the same mould. An elder must not be dazzled by thoughts of headship, gifts and powers, nor must he be attracted by things that could in any degree

puff up the image of self. Behold Him who stands in the midst of the throne, the Shepherd-Lamb; He appears slain, yet He is not lying dead, but standing alive — everything is in His hands. He is releasing powers and authorities into this world; He is reigning and ruling over all; He is the Shepherd-King. Therefore let every shepherd oversee his flock in this spirit; or else let him resign, confessing either his unfitness or inability or unwillingness (or perhaps all three) to do the duties his position demands.

Perhaps Paul, when charging Timothy and Titus with their special responsibilities, did so for these reasons. These young men were deputed by the great apostle to raise men in their districts to the station of elder and deacon. In doing so he laid little stress on gifts or talents, but great emphasis on

character. 'What kind of man is he?' not 'what can he do?' That these men were gifted, perhaps some even greatly, may be true, but that was not the criterion of judgment, nor the condition for election. They had to be men of exemplary life and conduct — elders must successfully come through every test the Spirit of God applies, for He is speaking expressly about the office in view of world-wide declension. If ever the churches needed this calibre of man it is now.

We must in no way be deceived, nor argue that as this kind of person is so rare nowadays we are justified in allowing a lower standard. That we are in the latter days, concerning which the Spirit was so powerfully urging Paul to speak with clarity and definition, makes no difference to the truth. Given this quality of life, the Lord is

well able to endue and endow men with ministerial gifts if He so pleases.

It cannot be too strongly pointed out that before God anointed His own Son with authority from on high, He had already lived before Him and all men with perfect grace, wisdom, strength and humility for thirty years. With the necessary exceptions due to His higher calling, the Lord fulfilled all the demands He later made upon others to live right. In fact, because of His calling, He lived a life of self-denial greater than He demands of any man. In their measure and order, elders have the onerous duty and great privilege of living in their generation as Jesus lived in His — spotless and without blemish on all the counts outlined by the writers of the New Testament.

[2] The Choice of God.

Before we can understand what the Spirit of God is saying, it is first necessary to discern what spirit is speaking. The fact that sometimes Paul wrote 'the Spirit', and not 'the Holy Spirit' as at other times, holds special meaning in the context of his remarks. Sometimes the intention is to refer to the third person of the Trinity with distinction and definition, giving proper emphasis to His personal being, in which case His name could only be written out in English in this form: THE The HOLY The SPIRIT. At other times He is mentioned in connection with His less important relationship and functions among men.

So when Paul uses the simple phrase 'the Spirit', he is referring to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of all he is saying. He is the Spirit of the whole body of truth, and the Spirit of the body of Christ; He is also the ruling Spirit

in Paul's person and body, and must be that also in the persons and bodies of would-be elders of the Church.

Not only elders, but also every member of every church is included in this; God has not devised a set of graded spiritual standards for members of His Church, as though elders and deacons must be of top quality, but others need not. What Paul is setting out is basic Christian living and he is saying, 'an elder or deacon must be this at very least; therefore, before you can consider a man for office, he must be of this calibre; no-one else is to be considered'. In other words Paul, as befits him, has laid the foundation without which the Church cannot be built. Now if an elder, in common with all saints, is to be a man of this basic quality, what are the other extra features that specially fit him for office?

Perhaps the clearest indication of primary requirements for eldership is to be found in the Old Testament incident already examined. The chosen seventy were outstanding: (1) they were natural elders; that is they were not youngsters; they were already men of standing, leadership and responsibility among the people; they were of proven worth; (2) they were to be burden-bearers — men able to share the burden of the people with Moses. They were to act for God as nursing fathers to their own people; (3) they were divinely and publicly elected; following Moses' selection the Spirit of their head came upon them; (4) they each received the gift of prophecy.

The outstanding things about it all to Israel at that time were these: (1) God decided to elect elders; (2) He did it for a specific reason; (3) He did it in a certain manner; (4)

He gave them a gift to mark their election. These men were elders unto God first; they were chosen to assist Him in bringing Israel to Canaan. They were also elders by appointment to all Israel, but this was a secondary thing. The burden of responsibility for the welfare of the people was laid on them by God. This is why He would not have youngsters; eldership is not a novitiate. Already these men were counsellors to whom younger people went with their problems for wisdom and guidance. But now, beyond advice, these men must give sympathetic help, lift the burden, carry the load and speak the prophetic word of God to the people.

The noteworthy thing is that the election was so public that everybody recognized the act of God. This is a most important part of the electoral process, and it must not be

overlooked; an elder may only bear office upon public recognition of the work of grace God has wrought in him. This is absolutely necessary, for unless this is so he will not have the respect of the people. A man placed in office without ability to command respect will not be able to furnish to the church satisfactory proofs of his divine election. This he cannot do unless the same Spirit which is upon the Mediator of the covenant in which he serves is upon him also. With the seventy it was the spirit which was upon Moses — today it is the Spirit which is upon Jesus. In other words he must be an anointed man.

The New Testament elder has to know two basic things: (1) of what spirit he is; (2) what anointing he bears. These are indispensable to the office. An elder is simply a man among many brethren; he must fully take to

heart the fact that the anointing which is upon him is also upon many others and is given him solely for office and function. He must also realise that this anointing is secondary to, and will only function consistently with, the Baptism common to every member of the Church. The Spirit of anointing is one and the same as the Spirit of Baptism; anointing is extra in dispensation, not different in substance and character. An elder must therefore recognise, confess, deport himself and act at all times in accordance with this truth; the Baptism of the whole body is greater than the individual anointing he has received to bear office in it. The Baptism of the Spirit is general in the Church; it is superior to and therefore must precede permanent anointing. It is fundamental and necessary

to all anointings for offices; it creates the body in which the offices exist and are held.

[3] Having a Good Report (a) with Men.

An elder must be a man of good report. He must obtain this in three realms: (1) from the church; (2) from the world; (3) from God. In each case this good report has to be earned. Having dealt with the first of these under a former heading, we will not now return to the point. With regard to the second, it may seem strange that a member of the Church should receive praise from the world, but in this matter it is nevertheless necessary. Unless a man has already established himself as upright, honest, consistent, true and just among the unsaved, he cannot be an elder in Christ's Church.

It will immediately become apparent why Christ did not straightway appoint into eldership the men whom He selected from the thousands of His disciples to be apostles. We know that, except in His heart, the Church with its many members and different offices did not then exist, so there was no need of elders. But we also know that elders are not the only persons to hold office in the Church; apostles also hold office. It is therefore of some significance that He called those He did select apostles and not elders. The apostles became elders when the Church was formed later, but the Lord carefully avoided calling them elders at the beginning.

Apostle was a new name and office. Israel already had elders, but no apostles. Had Christ elected and set up elders at that time, it would have been confusing indeed, and

could have been regarded as a seditious act aimed at establishing a rival national state. These men were chosen to be the foundations of the Church He said He would build, so He chose them to be with Him, called them apostles, used them for evangelism, and later made them elders.

They were totally inexperienced men, so He kept them with Him for a long time before sending them out, and when in process of time He did so, it was to preach and heal and baptise, not to found churches. When He gathered people together, He did so as the Good Shepherd. He never said anything about Head and Body, and only once did He speak of building His Church. People thoroughly understood Him to be a Shepherd and they His sheep; they were a flock; He said so. He never spoke of them as members of His Body or of His Church, but

as 'My sheep'. There were no churches gathered and founded while the Lord was on earth; God's plan was to baptise people into His Church from heaven. The Church was born and founded in His bodily absence on the day of Pentecost.

The twelve were apostles only in the etymological sense of the word. Judas was never an apostle of the Church. He was only one of the 'sent ones' of Jesus' earthly period: most certainly he was not an elder. The twelve men were called and chosen to be disciples before all their contemporaries, but they were not apostles of Jesus Christ and His Church in the spiritual sense and meaning of that word; they were very much novices. They could partly function as apostles at that time, but could not fill the role, and in no degree could they fulfill the role of elders — that was totally beyond

them. Before the apostles could be elders, they had to obtain a good report of them that were without. Following Pentecost they soon obtained that, and immediately almost automatically became acknowledged leaders and elders in the new community which sprang up at Jerusalem. This was inevitable on man's part as it was intentional on God's.

The Church did not elect its original elders; the apostles stepped into that position. So far as the people were concerned, the twelve became elders as of natural selection or automatic choice, but as far as God was involved in it they were made elders. By this God has given us an example of His methods. To have both God's and man's approval is a most essential qualification for eldership and also a very wise one. Present observation confirms the opinion that although there are those who have been

given gifts by God and therefore possess great ministry potential, they are not thereby qualified to be elders. Ministerial ability may be an indication of the Lord's intentions to establish a man in eldership eventually, and should perhaps be regarded in that kindly light, but eldership requires far more of a man then success in the ministry. An elder has to be a pillar, an immovable rock, not a heap of sand or a wandering star.

It is the eternally fixed, unchanging calibre of a man which qualifies him for eldership; he must be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. This is of more importance in the kingdom of God than the gifts he displays in the course of any other calling. The proof of this is Judas. He was equally an apostle with all the other apostles, but he was neither an elder in any church of Christ or in God's kingdom, nor did

he ever become one. He could preach, work miracles and baptise in water with the other eleven apostles, but he had neither the Spirit nor the qualities required for eldership. He was a thief and a liar, a traitor and a devil, but he was an apostle. Thank God he was not an elder though. To understand this is to possess the key to the understanding and explanation of much which may otherwise be obscure.

The office of elder was most treasured by the apostles; Peter and John referred to themselves as elders. It was especially dear to John, who wrote his letters as from that office; 'The Elder unto the elect lady', and 'The Elder unto the beloved Gaius'. Peter expressed it more humbly still: he was content to speak of himself as an elder among many elders. This did not mean that John thought of himself more highly than he

ought to think, or as being superior to Peter. It was just that he wanted to be thought of as an elder rather than be known and called by (what seems to be) the more spectacular title of apostle.

There is a greater difference between the two titles than the words themselves may at first convey. Apostle has most to do with personal relationship to Jesus Christ; elder has more to do with the Church. A man chosen to be an apostle of Jesus Christ is elected to function on the earth in the highest degree of likeness to Jesus Christ; he has most to do with the Lord's avowed intention to build His Church in the earth.

When a man is made an elder, he is not spoken of as 'an elder of Jesus Christ'; he is an elder of the Church. His role is governmental and is related more to the Church in its kingdom of God aspect on

earth than in its concept as the body of Christ. He is of course a member of that body, and is as devoted to Jesus Christ as any apostle. Indeed he cannot be an elder unless he is, but his office and authority is directed to the rule of God's spiritual estate on earth, viz. the kingdom of heaven.

Peter tells elders to 'feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof'. Paul also tells the Ephesian elders to 'feed the church of God'. In each case the word used is 'feed as a shepherd'; they are being instructed to 'pasture' or pastor the sheep, and the exhortation is spoken in context of the kingdom of God. When the risen Christ dealt with Peter on the shores of Tiberias, it was in order to prepare him for eldership, so the reiterated command to Peter was to feed the sheep and lambs of His flock.

Peter had been an apostle for three years and had ended up by denying his oft-confessed Master; now he must be taught his new calling — the fisherman must become the shepherd. The apostle must be made an elder; boat and net must be exchanged for rod and staff, sea must be forsaken for land, and fish for sheep. Apostle he would remain, but with the departure of Jesus, solid rule and dependable guidance must be provided for the flock which was to be gathered into the Church when the Holy Ghost was outpoured. Apostleship to Jesus must develop into foundation stone in the Church, or he would not be Peter; he must become under-shepherd to his Overlord, and look after the sheep for Him.

When the sheep were gathered and the Church founded and formed, it was soon recognised among them that Peter and his

fellow-apostles were of the right calibre to be their shepherd-elders. The seed of it all germinated on the day of Pentecost, bursting forth with the cry, 'Men and brethren what shall we do?' Those people acknowledged and recognised superiority of knowledge and experience, they were attracted by the spiritual life and singularity of purpose they saw in those men; their eldership was assured unto them. Whether or not it was immediately recognised as a spiritual office, elect of God among them, we do not know.

The use of the word elder in connection with the Church is not found in the Bible until Acts 11, verse 30. Apostles are referred to, so also are 'the twelve', and so are the seven servants, now known as deacons, but nowhere does the word elder occur in the opening chapters. It is highly likely that the

office, as distinct from apostleship, was created and filled among them somewhere between the events of chapter 6 and chapter 10. Necessity as well as design would have compelled them to do it; the one Church had developed into many churches; growth was the decisive factor. Localisation of government became imperative; little flocks were springing up everywhere; even Samaria was now the seat of a church. The apostle-elders of Jerusalem could not be everywhere at once, something had to be done.

However, necessity was not so overwhelmingly great that emergency or expediency became the ruling element in the Church. By means not directly stated, God elected elders in local churches, creating the office to function distinctly from apostleship. From that point onward the

word 'apostle' or 'the twelve' gradually drops out of the book, while the word 'elders' remains and increases. This is not to be made to mean that the apostles were eliminated from the Church, but that the period of rule by exclusive apostle-elders was passing away. De-centralization was taking place; the Church was becoming international in its outreach, and God did not want it to be conformed to Jewish patterns or under the control of Jews only.

Sin and world-conformity excepted, the churches must be allowed to develop according to their national and local setting. As this expansion extended, elders were appointed to supervise in the new churches and serve them in the Spirit of God, teaching them to edify themselves and build up the body of Christ in love. Their business was to see that men and women did not conform to

this world or get caught up in the spirit of the age, or absorbed by the particular kingdom of this world into which they had been originally born.

The government of the kingdom of Christ and of God is upon His shoulder, and those born anew into it must live under His authority and eldership in the churches. Obviously then, men who hold high office must be of good report among the churches, even as the original seven servants of the church at Jerusalem were in their day. 'Men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom' — this was the fundamental qualification for office in the beginning. Can it be less today?

[3] Having a Good Report (b) with God.

In addition to the foregoing, an elder must also obtain a good report from God. In

Hebrews 11 we are told that this is only procurable by the faith to which the writer is referring. He has in mind and puts into writing a series of anecdotes about national heroes and heroines whose faith could be seen in their attitudes, actions and works. This kind of faith is not: (1) credal faith — that is a statement or recitation of beliefs; (2) a compilation of dogmatic, theological tenets, or a received doctrine; (3) a confession, or treatise regarded as a complete compendium of truth called 'The Faith'. These all may have a place and perhaps he alludes to them in an earlier chapter when telling us all to hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering, but that is not what is under consideration here.

The concern of God here is example rather than precept, for as we know that is by far

the better part of truth. From Abe1 downwards throughout history these elders of faith are spoken of in connection with specific works. The record does not speak so much of what they believed as of what they did; Abel offered, Noah built, Abraham obeyed and went out, and so on. Each of them believed something of course; that is why their names are in this chapter, but what did they believe? 'Abraham believed God' we are told; there was no received doctrine to believe. And believing God, he obeyed Him and ultimately received the things that proceeded from God through that belief, and so it is with us also. These names are not there because of the creeds they held, but because they pleased God by doing what they did. That is the most important thing; He calls that 'Faith'.

It is most important that we understand this, so God has given His good report of these people; it comprises the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. By faith we understand, by faith we obey, by faith we worship and work and walk. Because God expects this kind of thing from us all equally, it is an absolutely essential qualification for eldership. Beyond ordinary good works which all must do, an elder must be distinguished by special faith and works; 'whose faith follow' the Spirit says. If a man has this faith, it will be noticed and spoken of in the church of which he is a member. This is the modern counterpart of that which is reported in scripture; it is God's good report of a man.

Without this, a man may not be an elder, for in order to fulfill his calling he must be able to pray the prayer of faith for the needs of others. Therefore he must be well reported

of, for unless he has this reputation, how shall he be trusted by others when need arises? Beyond personal faithfulness, which has to do with character, he must have productive faith revealed by active fruitful works; added to this he must have procuring faith also, obtaining a good report from God. All this is so because of the principle of life which governs all. It must be true of him, as it was of a great elder before him, that from a man as good as dead an innumerable multitude of faithful seed shall be born. All who spring from this faith will enter into abundance of life in which the promises of God are fulfilled. An elder must not only have a shepherd heart, he must have a father heart also.

Secondly, the man who is elected to any position of responsibility in the Church of Jesus Christ must recognise that the office

holds purchasing power. By the phrase 'position of responsibility' is meant an office created in the Church by Christ because it has first been held by Him. Basically all official positions in the Church were first held by Him as head or first in the body. Promotions to office are nothing other than gracious inclusions into His ministries to His Church; eldership is special favour granted with purpose, enabling men to share with Him in the administration of His kingdom. Any person so honoured must hold the position in trust, for it is given in Jesus' name; it is an authorisation from God.

All other positions which may be regarded as official, such as secretary or treasurer, young people's leader, Sunday School superintendent, women's this or men's that or the other are not offices created by God as being necessary to His Church. They may

be useful and beneficial, even in the same way as committees or communities or 'boards' have a use, but they are not elect offices in the Church. God does not need a secretarial staff, nor does He employ a treasurer, and so we could go on. Nevertheless, when on earth the Lord, who Himself was apostle, evangelist, pastor, teacher, prophet, elder, deacon and a member of the body of the whole Godhead, did use a treasurer — Judas.

Properly to use and fill the offices of God set in the body of Christ is to court respect, honour, gratitude and praise from Him as did Jesus when on earth. To be honoured of Jesus' Father is to have attained unto the highest possible position and greatest reward. God's 'well done, good and faithful servant' must mean more than anything else to a child of God. 'Purchasing a good

degree', though it is spoken of in connection with the office of a deacon, holds true over the whole field of office-bearing.

Election to eldership is no different from election to the diaconate or to apostleship. There is no order of merit in God's selection. He selects men and gives them pounds or talents or gifts and offices according to their several abilities. The fact that apostles are named first in a list of men holding office is simply that they are foundational in the structure of the Church or churches. In this God is revealing order, not preference.

Every man chosen by the Lord is preferred by Him for the particular office in which he is to function. If he is to be an elder, he is equipped by the Lord to be one; if an apostle or a prophet, he is likewise equipped, and so on throughout the whole range of offices for service in His Church. The

degree which is purchased is the qualification required by God for the bestowal of position, office or service in the New Creation. Faithful service in the discharge of office on earth fits a man for power and authority on the new earth. The words 'well done, good and faithful servant' are a reward in themselves for which we all should be glad enough to live and work and serve in this life. However in the parable they only presage other words such as 'enter into the joy of thy Lord', or again, 'be thou over ten cities', (or five or two cities as the case may be).

It is as though this present world of service is 'God's university' in which the saints have to learn and earn and pass their degrees. They must obtain a good report from God, and commendation from Him for having earned their degree. An elder must

thoroughly understand this — he must not let anyone take his crown, or rob him of his reward. He must use his office for the glory of God, realising the honour given him and the trust placed in him by the Lord, that he should rightly portray the eldership of God in the Church. He must also bear in mind that all positions in the body of Christ, including that of ordinary members, is by election.

Not only are offices rewardable; membership is rewardable also. That God has not appointed a person to eldership or some recognised office does not mean that he or she is automatically disqualified from reward. Each in his position has equal opportunity of reward and crowning. Christlikeness at all levels, whether apostle, elder, deacon or member, and faithfulness to and in the calling, is what God requires of

all. Calling is from God, so are election and appointment. No man chooses himself. The question 'what hast thou that thou hast not first received?' could be answered — 'nothing worth anything in the kingdom of God'.

4 — ASPECTS OF THE ANOINTING

[1] Priesthood

In a measure far superior to that which Moses knew, the Spirit of priesthood, mediation and headship is upon Jesus for ever. This same anointing is placed by God upon every man who is elected to eldership by Him in His Church, and it is essential that an elder understands the ground upon which he holds office, for unless he does so he cannot know and properly fulfill his calling. He must appreciate that the entire company among whom he has been selected to serve is a kingdom of priests. This was so in Israel after the flesh and it is more so in Israel after the Spirit.

In Israel of old elders and priests were of separate tribes, and followed different

callings. Priests were not then called to function as elders outside the Tabernacle among the people in general; they had a special and higher ministry altogether than the elders chosen from other tribes. This ministry, by its very nature, constituted every priest an elder in a sense far superior to those others. Even so, greater still, Aaron was the elder-priest over all his sons. By nature he was their father, and by virtue of this was priest and elder of the family, but for their official function among the larger family of Israel, Aaron's family was a company of brethren over whom he was the elder in the priesthood.

Now when Moses, Aaron's brother, originally received the Law for Israel, it was of a twofold nature: (1) written by God on the tablets of stone, (2) written by Moses in a book. To these were later added the first

manuscripts of the whole Bible. The tablets were placed and kept in the Ark out of the reach of everyone. Their privacy was inviolable, the existence of the nation depended upon that. Moses' own writings however were committed into the custody of the priests, and kept in safety in the Tabernacle. Eventually, therefore, the priests, beside being the ministers of the alter, also became the teachers of the people, teaching the laws of which they were the custodians.

From this arose Paul's admonition to the Church that an elder must be apt to teach. So we see that the elders of Israel held a position secondary to the priesthood. In common with all men, they first had to bring their offerings to the priests, who representatively presented them to God. This done, they then had to administer rule

to the people according to the Law, the precepts, the judgements and the ordinances kept under the guardianship of the priests. The ordinary elders were a direct link between people and priest in all matters pertaining to correct behaviour and discipline.

Differently from that however, in common with every other member of the New Covenant, Church elder and priest are one. This is not the same as saying that every priest is an elder. It does, however, mean that what an elder says or does in his office must spring from the faithful discharge of the higher calling to which every child of God is elected. Everything he does as an elder must function as from and secondary to and part of the more important general priesthood, and be executed with a view to the promotion of this eternal ministry to

which all are called. Sacrifice and offering unto God must be his ultimate objective in making all judgments, for that is everyone's primary duty. Unless his judgments are given in full knowledge of this, expressly for the purpose that the life of sacrifice and offering should continue and increase in the church he serves, he has failed completely.

As an instance of this, let us consider an illustration used by the Lord in course of uttering His Beatitudes and developing His teaching from them. With shrewd insight He propounds a hypothetical situation in which a man brings his gift to the altar and there remembers that his brother has something against him. In that event, says the Lord, the man must forebear to go through with his intended sacrifice; 'leave thy gift by the altar' He says, 'first go and be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift'.

In a later chapter the Lord again uses this same theme of reconciliation and develops His teaching: this time He speaks of winning the brother. The possibility of estrangement consequent upon losing a brother is a very important matter to Jesus — it must not happen in His kingdom. Let us suppose that this situation had arisen in a local church and that the elders had been called on to give judgment on the matter. Would not their judgment have been the same as that of Jesus? Undoubtedly it would; there must be repentance, reconciliation and restoration to brotherly love. But beyond that, and as a result of it, the gift must be finally offered upon the altar — there must be restitution to priestly function.

This is the objective of all judgment; first as proof that the reconciliation between the brethren has been effected, and secondly as

the confirmation that reconciliation between each and God has been restored. Unless priesthood is re-established, judgment is unfulfilled. Other things would also surely be involved, but as these were cleared up, all would eventuate in restoration to priesthood.

Brotherhood and priesthood are inseparably joined by God, and their union must be inviolable in practice. In course of giving judgment, the end in view is not just to speak a word of wisdom, nor to apply a biblical rule; the first may be necessary, the second obligatory, but the objective is offering to God. An elder must firmly grasp this word spoken by Paul, 'that the offering up of the Gentiles may be acceptable ..... being sanctified by the Holy Ghost'. Paul was speaking as an elder-apostle-priest. He shared with his great Elder-Apostle-High

priest the knowledge that, since Christ is not an earthly priest, 'He must have somewhat to offer', which is not of an earthly order. The Lord Jesus shared with Paul His burning desire to put everyone bodily on the altar as a spiritual sacrifice unto God His Father. Every elder must be consumed with this desire also, or else he cannot hold office. He must first offer his own gift and then encourage his brethren to do likewise.

This is the primary function of the shepherd among the flock of God. He must not feed them for himself or themselves, but for this purpose alone. If he lives solely for the purpose of presenting himself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, he will be an ensample to the flock. No man may be a shepherd unless, as Jesus the Chief Shepherd, he first is a lamb provided for sacrifice. He is then fit to urge everyone else

to be and do the same, leading them to the altar. An elder must move or restore every heart to its own priestly office and function in the body of Christ after the example of Jesus and the ensample of himself, therefore all rule and judgment must be to that end.

In Hebrews chapter 13 there are some memorable passages in which the writer charges them to be obedient to those who have the rule over them. He is referring of course to elders who are themselves under charge to give an account of their stewardship to God; theirs is an onerous position indeed. However, with the injunction to submit and obey, the Lord characteristically enough takes care to show the sheep the kind of shepherds to whom they are to submit and obey. Very purposely in verses 20 and 21 He includes information about true shepherding: 'God brought again

from the dead our Lord Jesus'; God is the Shepherd, Jesus is the Lamb who has been raised in order to become in turn the Great Shepherd of all the sheep.

Therein lies the example to the whole flock, and especially to the elder-shepherds. To the flock the elders must first be ensamples — before they speak a word to teach or command, they must learn and obey this principle of all office. It is they who first of all must obey the general directive 'let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp bearing His reproach'. The writer is making free use of his excellent knowledge of ancient and modern Hebrew history. The first seventy elders of Israel were made elders outside the camp. That is where God put the spirit of Moses upon them, and that too is where Jesus suffered — 'without the

gate'; there also He died and was buried and rose again.

To be an elder worthy of the name a man must go to Jesus outside the gate, bearing His reproach without the camp. Unless he bear reproach no-one can be an elder; he must prove it by his life. Another thing he must understand and remember all his days is that God expects no-one to follow him unless he be a man of faith; the sheep are told to follow an elder's faith as well as obey his words. An elder must first believe his own words; if he has not faith to walk in his own statements, who can be expected to follow him? The end of his way of life must be 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever', or else he is false.

If he claims that Jesus Christ lives in him, an elder must furnish living evidence of it for the sheep to consider. No man or woman is

obliged to follow an elder just because he is an elder, neither is a person expected to follow blindly and unquestioningly. All sheep must consider where they are being led; if the end in view is not the unchanging Jesus, if the net or gross result of the teaching and leading is not unto Him outside the gate without the camp in utter reproach, they must not follow.

[2] Mediation.

The elder's second great function under the Spirit is to be a mediator. This is a high calling indeed. He must understand that his work in jurisdiction is to mediate between God and man, and man and man in that order. He is not called to be a mere social reformer, spending his life adjudicating between man and man, patching up quarrels; his ministry is of a far higher order than that. He must be entirely given up to

God, regarding all without partiality or prejudice; if he is not he has no wisdom from on high. Fully developed in his ministry, God will make him all things to all men, serving all, yet the slave of none.

When in judgment, under no conditions may he be for one against another — he must be for God for both, even if one of the parties involved happens to be of his own flesh and blood or a special friend. Jesus prayed 'that they all may be one', and Paul says, 'God is one', thereby revealing that the object of mediation is to bring together and unite in one. Mediation is based upon and governed by the truth of Reconciliation. Reconciliation is complete restoration, utterly without compromise, resulting from total elimination of the cause of offence from the heart.

Compromise on the other hand is based upon agreement to settle for less than the

highest, accept the offending thing and somehow get round or bridge over it. Eldership requires wisdom here, lest it mistake the one for the other and accept a state between brethren which Jesus Christ abhors. Both parties must be ministered to in the spirit of reconciliation.

A word of wisdom from James helps us here: 'love covers the multitude of iniquities'. He is speaking with remembrance of God's Old Testament methods. Under that covenant, by a system of atonements, God covered over what could not then be eliminated because the time was not yet come. But when He sent His Son to Calvary He removed sin altogether. Behold then the patience and longsuffering of God; He was prepared to wait for the fullness of time and judge nothing until then; Jesus' death was retroactive. At the time God was in Christ

reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them'.

A very real element of this redemptive attitude and purpose must be in every elder or he cannot mediate truth properly. God in him must deal with the trespasses of the offending parties and resolve and remove them. This may well entail a degree of suffering on the elder's part — he must not shirk it. Perhaps for a period nothing may be done about certain matters because the fullness of time has not come. Love may have to cover the trouble for a while longer yet. Maybe also in some instances Paul's words to Timothy must be an elder's received advice, 'some men's sins go before to judgment and others' follow after'. It is better to leave some things alone until the judgment of that great day. Finality of judgment belongs to God.

When dealing with brethren, a mediating elder is never of one; he must not be partial. Each party in a dispute is brother to him and to the other, and must be treated as such with strict impartiality. God is one, and each of the brethren is His son and God is in him, therefore they must, without delay, become absolutely one by reconciliation. That is the whole point of mediation. In making man one with God, Jesus Christ became each and both — He was God/Man. So also an elder must become each and both; union must be achieved through the judging elder.

Therefore an elder is required to be dead to sin and self that he might live unto God only. Failure at this point will render him unfit to rule, for he will be unable to pronounce with power on certain subjects. Only through his own calvary shall life come to others in the matter. That is the spirit of mediation in

which an elder must live and function; without it he cannot hold office.

Since this spirit is the Spirit in which we all are baptized, an elder must have a double portion of it. The ancient elders were already sons of Israel; by their anointing they became elder brothers; that is they received the double portion which always went with the inheritance of the firstborn or elder son. With that they functioned as having twice as much as their brothers and sisters. In the New Covenant everyone born of God inherits jointly with Jesus the firstborn, so with the basic inheritance common to all, plus the extra gifts that go with the office, an elder has quite sufficient for effective ministry. Therefore should one or each of the parties refuse to be reconciled, the elder must not give up his aim. He must wait God's time and take any

opportunity which presents itself to bring the brethren together.

[3] Headship.

The third great aspect of the anointing for eldership is that of headship. This has more to do with kingly authority and rule than with judgment. Headship has to do with kings' courts and crown and sceptre rather than law courts and scales and sword. Elders are heads over a local church in much the same way as Christ is Head over His Church universal. In common with all offices instituted by Christ, headship is more a required condition than an acquired position. Unless this or the potential for it be found in any man, he is not an elder, nor can he be, and to elect him to such a position is anti-Christ.

An elder directly stands for Christ in sacred trust to discharge His superior authority and absolute Lordship over His Church. Great care must be exercised in this, lest man's counterfeit authoritarianism be mistaken for God's genuine authority; these are contrary one to the other. Remember Peter's word, 'neither as being lords over God's heritage.

Of old, elevation to office was almost always ceremoniously displayed by pouring oil upon the head. Office-bearing is always associated with headship, hence the significance of the ministration; it was as the bestowal of an extra crown upon the crown of the head. It was a sign of approval signifying the gift of authority from on high, a prize from God of rare worth.

The elders of Israel were not elevated to office by outward anointing though; their exaltation was by the direct oncoming of the

same spirit which was upon Moses. In their case the symbol was dispensed with (perhaps for the reason that it only signified one aspect of the ministry of the exalted Christ), but when it happened they were recognised immediately for what they were. We have no means of testing their experience, or to what degree of headship they attained, but there is nothing to prevent us from coming to an understanding of all that is meant by headship in New Testament eldership.

The head is the most glorious and impressive member of the body. By its very position it is the most exalted member of all. In it reside all faculties governing knowledge and experience; it is the seat of the central control of intelligent life. No other member shares with it in this — the head is unique. We could dispense with other body-

members, such as legs and feet and toes and arms and hands and fingers, and still live, but we cannot lose our heads and live.

Apropos this, it is a well-attested fact that people who lose limbs by amputation or accident, upon occasions feel as though the limb was still there, though it may have long since been removed. This has to do with brain and nerves; and sometimes temperatures, impressions, memories, feelings also may effect this. The lost member still belongs to the mind of the head, although for some reason it may have ceased to be a part of the body.

In the head reside the organs of sight, hearing, speech, taste, smell; therein also resides the centre and power of thought, imagination, decision and many other associated abilities vital to mobility and proper enjoyment of life. The head

interprets to the person what is actually going on in and around (or is thought to be the feelings of) every part of the body. It also bears the face, which openly expresses on its features the underlying character of the individual — what a wonderful member is the head!

We see then all that is implicit in and is meant by headship, and in what eldership consists. It is nothing other than the authority and lordship of Christ vested in a man, that he may rule among his brethren in Christ's name. Authority in this office is granted by the bestowal of all the powers associated with the head. Eldership is majestic, glorious, powerful, wise, firm, clear, balanced, intelligent, tasteful, sensitive, decisive, imaginative, thoughtful. It is the open face of God, the clear outshining of the untroubled deeps of the

Lord, the expression of inward consistency. In his order and measure an elder in his headship must be clear-eyed in oversight, open eared to the voices of the flock, authoritative in decision, sensitive to truth. He must feel for others, have the mind of Christ, speak His word, and represent to the Church the many virtues of the Lord.

Headship is demonstrable by exercise of authority and must express itself by just rule administered in grace. As well as being the sceptred hand and the crowned head in the local church, eldership is unlimited grace. What manner of man an elder must be in all lowliness of mind, humility, godliness and power!

The dangerous snare of authoritarianism must be avoided though. The spirit that seeks to dominate is not of God and has no part in His kingdom. Authoritarianism and

officiousness are twin evils having their roots in pretence; they are blustering weakness and boastful pride. Uncrucified self operates them as substitutes for the authority and power it does not possess. The objective is unlawful control over the Church of God by brute force. The man who seeks to induce admiration for himself in his office has completely failed to grasp the fact that the head of every man is Christ; he must learn that each member has to hold the head, not the elder. Usurpation of Christ's unique position of direct headship and authority over every member is inexcusable; grasping at Christ's personal ministry is idolatry and has caused many an elder to fall. This is a trespass against the Lord's sovereignty, and must be repented of.

Paul, the Gentiles' first apostle-elder, said he did not have dominion over any man's faith.

Except under direct inspiration from God, he never spoke in commandment to anybody, but gave his advice as one who had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. An elder must ever keep humble in heart so that he does not intrude into a man's private life with God; in his office he must be unobtrusive. He must respect and honour each individual's personal relationship with his Lord.

This anointing of threefold power and authority is not a substitute for the Christ; on the contrary it is the anointing of His presence among His people as priest, mediator and head. Moreover, coupled with prophecy, as it was in the original elders, it gives ability to speak words of wisdom and knowledge straight from God; making an elder, God makes a prophet too. By this means people come to rest, assured of

receiving mature truth they can trust and upon which they can act. Prophetic ministry is indispensable to the office of eldership — no man ought to be considered for the office unless he possesses the ability.

[4] Counsel.

A man's chiefest claims to eldership lie in recognition of these basic qualities of life and gift, but it does not lie only in these; the position requires of a man that he be able to give counsel also. Elders are counsellors; they must therefore have the confidence of the people. As this cannot be commanded of men, it must be won by the elder himself. No man can appoint himself someone else's confidant; indeed if he is appointed of God he has no need to do so. If the Spirit of Christ rests permanently upon a man he is obviously anointed of the Lord unto a

ministry of some kind, and will speedily commend himself to others' consciences.

This was the case with the Lord and His apostle-elders. John Baptist clearly stated that he had been told by God that the Son of God was He upon whom he should see the Spirit of God descending and remaining, so John kept on with his ministry of water baptism until what God had said happened. He saw the Spirit of God descend in bodily shape like a dove upon Jesus and remain on Him, and God's servant bare record saying, 'this is the Son of God'.

5 — PERMANENCY AND SCOPE

God does not install any man into office except by permanent anointing. Temporary moving of the Spirit on a person for occasional operations of gifts is not to be mistaken for anointing to permanent office. The symbol of the Holy Ghost in ministerial anointing is the dove. Alighting without fear upon quiet, undisturbed resting-places, it is most sweet and tender and gentle. Permanence rather than power is the prime feature of anointing, and its surest indication, but even so it is not a fluttering, fluctuating thing.

Quiet, restful, gentle men, full of inner strength, without pride or boastfulness, are God's choice for eldership. These are easily entreated, openly approachable, lowly in spirit, full of understanding and faith, with

the stamp of Jesus Christ about them. They must be available at all times, free from themselves, utterly devoted to their calling, without fear, able to minister to the sick and poor and needy, servants of all.

An unmistakable degree of permanence is one of the most important features of anointing to office. It cannot be too strongly stated that without this a man is most certainly not elected of God. Deeper than minor blemishes, there is some major flaw in a man's makeup if he is not permanently anointed of God; its absence indicates that he has been passed over for office by the Lord because of the defect.

One of the more distressing errors extant in these days is the notion that everything lies in the anointing; it does not. Before a man is anointed of God for New Testament ministry he has to be approved of Him. This is easily

demonstrated from scripture in no less a person than Jesus Himself. When His anointing was accomplished in Jordan, it was openly attested to by His Father, and accompanied by the descent of the dove. God announced very clearly, 'this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'. The anointing was the seal of God's good pleasure; not so much the good pleasure He had purposed in Himself from all eternity, though connected with it, but His total pleasure with His Son for His past thirty years of human life. The anointing did not bestow God's good pleasure; it was bestowed because of that good pleasure. Jesus' life fitted Him for the anointing; the anointing did not fit Him for life. It fitted Him for His ministry in the sense of equipment for public service, but His life fitted Him for the office. He had 'arrived' at full stature;

now He could function in His well-deserved office in power and authority, with full paternal approval before all men.

[6] Scope.

Thirdly an elder must thoroughly grasp the fact that his call and promotion to office is primarily in the Church of Jesus Christ, not just in the local church. This is very closely linked with the foregoing section and may be illustrated by a further reference to the first seventy elders chosen by the Lord in the Old Covenant. Those men were the elders of the whole Israel of God then present. They were not chosen to serve their families, or just a small company, or even a tribe of their fellows, but all the race. Presumably they would have been given local spheres of service among their brethren, and been made responsible to and for a certain group. They could only have operated in a limited

area to a limited number of people at a time, but their election was not just to those people, be they many or few, but to all Israel. They shared a common, simultaneous anointing to the whole body. They were not of an individualistic or party spirit; they were given of one Spirit, that their ministry should be inter-family, inter-tribal and intermediary.

Likewise with present-day elders; they may function in a local setting to a certain number of people, but their office and loyalty are in and unto the whole Church. Although their particular ministry may be quite localized to a few people in a tiny sphere, its effect is in and to the whole body of Christ, and rendered to Christ its head. Their concern must be rightly to represent and serve Him, doing as He would in the Church, ministering and discharging their duties in His name in the local situation.

God's gifts and calling are quite without repentance on His part, and unless a man by sin forfeits his office, he is elected for life with a view to eternity. Therefore, wherever he is, an elder is always an elder.

The idea that a man may be an elder in one place and not in another is entirely without scriptural foundation and quite foreign to spiritual principle. It is altogether the same as saying that a child of God is a child of God in one place and not in another. Unless forfeiture be imposed by God because of persistent failure on the part of the person called, everything in everybody involved in the callings of God is permanent. This is because calling is unto the body and not to a group of members of the body.

A man cannot deny his calling to eldership because he is moved from one location or group to another. Must he cease to purchase

his degree and lose his boldness because of God's will to move him to another place? Was the apostle-elder, Paul, any the less an apostle-elder because he was imprisoned, or did John lose his office when placed on Patmos? The Lord does not change His mind; He chooses men according to foreknowledge, and when He installs into office He does so with predestinating intention and power.

However, although this is so, an elder must not think that he may go anywhere he will, or be moved anywhere in God's will, and be immediately accepted in that local situation in the same way and in the identical capacity he enjoyed in his late situation. In his new situation he has to re-create his ground of acceptance among men, so that he may be as well-reported of in that environment as in the former one. That he has a good report

from God is not sufficient ground to demand recognition and acceptance among men who do not know him. Indeed, if he should insist upon an immediate position, he will soon lose his good report from God. If he is an elder, the fact will soon become apparent to all, for his qualities will make him outstanding in any company. If he be among his equals, speedy recognition is the more likely, so he has nothing to fear or lose by abiding God's time.

Permanent eldership however does not depend upon human recognition. It can neither be given nor taken away by man. A man is still an elder, even if men refuse to recognize him as such or allow him to be that to their group. If men's blindness and/or rebellion continue to prevent him filling a position among them, a man of God must not think he will thereby fail to fulfill

his calling and thus grieve God. He need not fear; he will not lose his reward; men cannot deprive him of the prize, nor rob him of the crown of duty. He must depend entirely upon God's righteousness, and faithfully abide in the knowledge of his call, trusting God's wisdom, power and love.

God does not appoint to office for nought, and if for a time He lays aside His servant, let that man rest in God's sovereign will in the matter. Temporary suspension of activity reveals a man's quality; it will test his character, and prove his calibre. To be ignored or rejected or unrecognized can do nothing but improve a man if he abides patient in love. Let him think nothing of himself, seek nothing for himself, do nothing to rectify the position, nor fret for God's glory; God is content.

During such a period a man must pay no attention to any qualifications he may have or think he has, lest he bemoan their seeming loss to the Church and become embittered through men's folly; quality is better than qualifications. A man's gifts and ministries may only be used of God under His direction; He believes that nothing should be lost. Any attempt to attract men's attention to oneself for the sake of the gift and its proper use in the Church is a sure way to bring the gift into disrepute. This kind of behaviour displeases God, and if continued will bring to impotence and rejection from office. When a man has been placed in office by God, all true members of His Church sufficiently. able to discern, and mature enough to observe, will recognize and acknowledge God's election.

It is therefore prudent of a church to move in accord with God's choice, thank Him for His grace and incorporate such a man into its function. If this is not done, by the very law of the Spirit who seeks to unite all, dissension will arise, and schismatic tendencies develop. Finally splits will occur and totally unnecessary harm be done to the body. Inevitably spiritual men will gather themselves unto their natural overseers as sheep to true shepherds, and all the arguments about unity of the faith will not prevent them from doing so, for they are keeping the unity of the Spirit.

Unity of faith can only operate where unity of Spirit is first recognized and promoted. The unity of the Spirit is a unity of spirits created among men by the Spirit of God. God is the Unity into whom regenerate men have been baptized to find and abide in

unity. This can only be accomplished among men as they are fully prepared to cast aside all man-made copies of the original, and live and die for what God has instituted.

It little matters what name a man bears in his office, so long as the ministry or work of the particular office he holds is being fulfilled. Whether a man is called a bishop or an overseer or a presbyter or an elder is inconsequential. He may even be called a deacon when he ought to bear any one of the other four names, but it matters not; for not the name he bears, but the office he fills before God and the ministry he wields among men is the important thing.

Until those seven men of the early Church were elected to what is termed 'the diaconate' the apostles were doing the work themselves. Paul calls himself 'the deacon (Gk.) of Jesus Christ'; every one of the

apostles of Jesus Christ was an apostle-elder-deacon. The office of deacon was only created and men elected to it because the apostles needed to be relieved of their overburdensome load, that is all.

Nevertheless there seems little sense in discarding scriptural names in preference for others of man's choice, for God's names are callings; they are also definitions of what He wants and what He gives. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, elders, deacons are precisely what their names indicate. If men call their fellows by these names when they are not what the name declares, they speak falsely. The true Church will soon recognize the error, or if it be worse, unmask the deceit. Elders are elders for the same reason and by the same means and upon the same principle that the Saviour is the Saviour.

This principle of recognition and acknowledgment of God's gifts to men is an important factor in office-bearing in the Church. Therefore it is vital that every member of the Church of Jesus Christ in all the churches should know about them. Firstly it is essential to a proper understanding of the subject that everything to do with the Church is by gift from God. It all begins with the statement that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Because Jesus Christ Himself is God's gift, everything in His Church must be of gift, for it is His body. Whatever term we may use to describe His works of grace, whether it be salvation, redemption, forgiveness, repentance, faith — what you will — each emphasizes one aspect of gift; all is by divine favour alone.

When praying to His Father about His apostles, the Lord said to Him 'thine they were and thou gavest them me'; His men were a gift to Him from Father and were exceedingly precious to Him for that reason. But we must take into account the fact that He also chose them — 'I have chosen you and ordained you', He said to them. So we have two factors operating here: (1) God's gift and (2) (the) man's choice. God never enforced His gift upon Jesus, and Jesus did not choose any who were not given Him.

Note the emphasis upon this principle of divine life and working in the affairs of the kingdom recorded in John chapter 6 — 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out'. The Father's gifts did not automatically take effect in Jesus' affairs. He had power to refuse if He wished; He could

have cast out the Father's gifts, refused to recognize His Father's grace, and chosen otherwise, but He did not. Jesus chose those who had already been chosen for Him.

When the Lord ascended up on high ..... 'He gave gifts unto men' and He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and some teachers. The Lord gives to the Church men already called and equipped by Him for office, but the churches must choose the divine/human gift for themselves. In doing so, churches must not choose according to their own will, but God's obvious will. In such an important matter as this, God's unmistakable will is clearly shown in four ways, each of which is marked out for us in the person of His Son, namely: giving, sending, sanctifying, sealing. These four features are as clearly defined in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ as they are

openly stated by Him of Himself. For that reason they must also be true of every man bearing office in His name.

An elder must therefore know that he is called in order to be given and sent. So also must the Church be prepared to receive him as the gift of God, whether it be as one given direct from God, having been raised from the midst, or else having been sent to them from another district bearing the seals of his office. Note that the word 'sent' in this connection is not primarily to be understood in terms of linear measurement, though this may apply in the case of an apostle. 'Sent' refers chiefly to the election and purpose of God which cannot be measured because it cannot be comprehended by the human mind.

An elder is a man raised up in the Church and given to a church; he must never think

that a church is given to him; he must know the position truly. He is also a man 'sent' to that church from the heart of God. Such a man is at once known to all, for he will sanctify himself unto his ministry, knowing that he is already sanctified by God to fulfill an office of Christ.

In this care must be exercised to ensure that divine sanctification is not confused with human dedication. These are often mistaken one for the other, for they must co-exist — each must include the other. Many dedicated persons seriously apply themselves without ceasing to various forms of service chosen by themselves or others, yet know nothing of sanctification. Such zeal, earnest as it may be, is nothing but carnal energy; it must needs be recognized as such and rejected.

Sanctification by God unto office-bearing is appointment to a ministry under the anointing of the Spirit; it is called ordination. However, dedication must follow from and accompany ordination or the election will be in vain. When God sanctifies a man in office, that man inevitably regards his position and ministry as holy unto the Lord. He is set aside in it as a precious office of gift from God to man. An elder then must be a holy man of God, separated from sin and self-ambition, wholly given unto his ministry, an example of holiness, ready to render his account to God at any moment.

Obviously such sanctification will have its seals. Its first seal is the holy dove resting upon his lamb-like spirit; the Holy Spirit Himself is the seal. Paul writes of it as 'anointed and sealed in Christ'. At Jordan God the Father sealed the Son in office with

the Spirit, and from thence He went forth as a man with a ministry sent on a mission. That is the most important factor in a man's sealing.

It leads to the second seal, namely this: the man who is sealed for the ministry must inevitably have the ministry sealed unto him. This is quite distinctly brought out for us by the apostle Paul when writing to the Corinthians — 'the seal of my apostleship are ye', he told them. God had sealed him an apostle unto Himself and the Church, and the Corinthian church was, for reasons obvious to him, the seal of his office and ministry. They were the flesh and blood proof of the invisible inward spiritual anointing — the seal of the seal. The first was the seal of God's choice and of his sealing unto office; the second was the seal

of the ministry to which he was appointed in the office, and also of his faithfulness.

These things must be found in the life of every man who is called of God and chosen for an office in His Church; without them he may not long be allowed to remain in the position. Except the first two be true of him he ought not to have been recognized as holding office, and should not have been installed into it; without the second two soon becoming apparent he must be put out of office. That he is a good man is not sufficient reason for promotion to office. Every member of the Church ought to be that.

6 — ELDERSHIP AND MARRIAGE

By setting a high standard of qualification for office in the Church, the Lord has shown great wisdom. In its beginning it had almost insuperable difficulties to overcome. Great problems beset the early Church, many of which God eliminated by setting highest standards of life and attainment for elders.

Four major social problems confronted the saints: (1) Slavery, (2) Polygamy, (3) Bigamy, (4) Divorce and remarriage. The Lord dealt with the first on a far wider front than just the issues involved in promotion to office. Nevertheless it is at once obvious that in a Church awakened to spiritual values, it soon became unethical for a slave-owner to be an elder. On the other hand though, there is no reason why a slave could not continue in his slavery. Ever-increasing love of itself

eliminated the human malady. But neither Paul nor Peter raised the point when writing on the subject of eldership in their famous epistles. However, they spoke freely and strongly on other issues involved in eldership.

Paul's expression, 'the husband of one wife' is a phrase of genius. It has direct bearing upon the second and third points mentioned above, and was doubtless introduced for that reason. Beyond being a clear command, the phrase also settles the matter of woman's standing in relationship to the highest governmental office in the churches. Paul does not go on to say 'or the wife of one husband as the case may be'. God has not opened the office of elder to the female; it is exclusive to the male. Should it be otherwise, God would be found to be contradicting Himself, for the office carries

supreme human authority given by the Lord to the male.

There is altogether too much ignorance in the churches regarding the proper position of the female. Because in Christ 'there is neither male nor female', but a new creation, does not mean that God has ceased to make difference between the sexes on earth. In Christ a man is not a man and a woman is not a woman. Human bodies, being yet unredeemed, are not in Christ. Spirits in Christ lose their human form and bodily relationships, and become one; we become unmarried and unsexed to anyone and everyone in favour of a new relationship altogether. In the Church which is His body we are all changed into a condition of life and form of existence which is not reproducible by man and woman. In the churches we are all in our human bodies,

and still male and female made for the purposes of God; that is unalterable.

As surely as God created Adam the male first, He did it with intention, embracing all future priorities in governmental realms among living persons. We do not know what we shall be in the new creation; we do however know what we are now. God's order and wishes and commandments must be respected and obeyed. He does not change the human order by changing spiritual forms of existence. Paul's commandments are to human beings, and are given to churches of males and females, not the Church of Jesus Christ in its spiritual unity and form as His body.

Examination of the context in which the words 'house' and 'church' are used in 1 Timothy 3, reveals Paul's meaning. He thoroughly understood the difference

between the Church and the churches. So also did every member of the Church in every church. He had no need to explain this difference to Timothy, nor to exhort him to explain it to the Ephesians — they all understood what he meant and to which company he referred.

In verse 5 he is plainly speaking of man ruling a family in his own house. To be able to do so is evidently regarded as a necessary qualification for rule in the church (note: church not Church; men do not rule in the Church which is Christ). Here a man's house is paralleled with the local church made up of male and female as is an ordinary family. Paul then proceeds in verse 15 to use the same language and ideas when talking of the saints' corporate behaviour in their gatherings. Again he is speaking of the local church, not the Church.

Each church is God's house over which He rules through elders. In the Church universal He reigns alone, He has not ordained eldership of human beings to rule in that body. Every man in the body of Christ is directly responsible to Him, He is the Elder. No man, whatsoever office he may hold, may interfere with or seek to interfere with or seek to interpose himself between any member and his Head. Failure to see or refusal to receive this truth has wrought much havoc in souls, and brought confusion to the churches. Male elders are ordained to rule over all females and other males only in the churches.

Paul links this with revelation of the great mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. (Note

the careful use of the small 'g' for godliness and the capital for God, denoting the translators' proper use of grammar and perfect understanding of truth.) God was manifest in the flesh as a man, not a woman. God is never spoken of in the feminine gender, but always in the masculine. This is the ground of His election; it has been that way from the beginning and is unalterable.

Paul was not speaking of behaviour in the Church, but in the church. That the two are linked is irrefutable, but it is plain that the whole epistle is an instruction in behaviour and procedure in the local churches. The people of the local church are the house in which God dwells in a particular place. Because of His presence and under His rule men are ordained to office in the capacity of elder brethren.

If God permitted females to be made elders, it would be a declaration of total reversal of all natural order. In that event women would be appointed to rule over men with the authority of God. The inference would be that she has been permanently ordained to be his head, whereas Paul says that the man is the head of the woman. If men install women into eldership, they do so contrary to God's clearly expressed will, and her appointment is spurious and her intention wrong; she is openly usurping authority over the male. Paul said by the Spirit, 'I suffer not a woman to teach or usurp authority over the man'.

Usurpation does not lie only in the woman's unlawful grasping of power contrary to God's will — it lies also in the man's abdication of authority and headship. It is a repetition of the tragedy of Eden; God will

not have it. The power to decide who shall hold office in a church does not reside with men, but with the Lord. God is not the author of confusion. Care must be taken here that the woman is not treated as though she were Balaam's dumb ass. Elders in a local church may give permission for their female members to use any talent or gift bestowed upon them by the Lord. But a woman may not please herself as to the time or manner of function. In common with every member, she must work in co-operation with her elders, and at no time may she teach as being 'over' the male, but 'under' his authority.

An elder may not so abdicate his office or connive at circumventing the Lord's plain statements that he virtually hands over his teaching or ruling position to females, be they ever so gifted. He must

unostentatiously retain control without authoritarianism while still encouraging the gifts or ministries of his sisters in the Lord. Tacit agreement must not be allowed to slide into permanent abdication of responsibility. An elder must rule, and rule well, or else be removed from office.

Polygamy and bigamy are no longer problems in the churches of the western hemisphere. Civil legislation has prohibited these in our lands. It would be a crime against society, as well as a sin against God, to practise either in the churches. They were rampant in the nations from which the Church was gathered, but we do not find any New Testament author writing against these practices. God met these carnal anti-social practices by simply making the rule that neither a polygamist nor a bigamist could fill any of the top offices in the Church. The

phrase 'husband of one wife' safeguarded the offices of elder and deacon from protagonists of sexual excess. By this ruling the Lord long ago successfully purged these two evils from the churches; neither of them is a major problem with us today.

The fourth matter, however, is still a very live issue in the churches of the western world. This ought not to be, for Jesus is very clear in His statements about it. Naming only one reason acceptable to Him for divorce, He plainly pronounced wholeheartedly against it. Divorce and remarriage is wrong according to Him. Many arguments have been put forward to lessen the force of His words, but none have succeeded in satisfactorily altering the meaning of His Spirit. He admitted that Moses suffered divorce in Israel, but said bluntly that he only did so because of their hardness of heart.

Divorce was something God allowed, but did not will. The final pronouncement given in Jewry by the great Judge raised up of God to judge all men, was not in favour of it. It is highly unlikely that what He says about it on the great and dreadful day of final judgment will be substantially different from the pronouncements He has already made; His Spirit surely remains unchanged on the subject.

The only other New Testament person who handles the problem is Paul; wisely he does not handle the thorny problem with the directness of the Lord. It appears that without exception all the apostles regarded Jesus' statements as being new age-abiding law. The familiar 'ye have heard that it was said of old time ..... but I say unto you .....' was perfectly acceptable to them, and regarded as final and binding for the Church.

Therefore they did not attempt to add to its spirit, or take away from its power and meaning; not one jot or tittle was altered. Paul clarifies one or two points, but does so without changing his Lord's intentions one degree.

Much has been written and millions more words spoken about these things, but the Lord's perfect will is immutable. His standards cannot change; He gave Adam the first man one wife, that is all, and says of divorce 'in the beginning it was not so'. The distinctive feature about Abraham, the father of the faithful, was that he had one wife only; his defection into concubinage wrought disaster.

The fact that other great names in scripture are associated with polygamous concubinage in no way lessens the import of Jesus' words 'in the beginning it was not so'.

God allowed people to defect from His perfect will, but He did not approve of it. The Church ought not to seek to argue about words, but to understand the spirit, principles and meaning in the mind of God. As the Lord, we must go back to God's original intentions. Minds seeking justification for rebellious attitudes and disobedient actions find loopholes everywhere. Jesus does not expect His people to do this, but gladly to receive His intentions and implications as well as His expressions.

The Bible, especially the New Testament, is not a legal document any more than it is a scientific treatise, but the principles of life inscribed therein must be received by us as spiritually, morally and legally binding, even as they are scientifically sound. Paul's attitude to marriage, plainly stated, was that

it is better not to marry. By this he meant primarily that a person is freer to serve God if he has no marital and family commitments and obligations. He does say, however, 'it is better to marry than to burn' (with unfulfilled desire), and also declares 'every man has his proper calling of God'. Therefore he does not enforce celibacy; indeed far from it he says, 'I will that the younger women marry'. His challenge to self-denial along these lines is generally directed to men for the gospel's sake.

This man's approach to the whole subject is modelled on the person and example of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was the Son of God. He lived a life of celibacy; He stood steadfast in His heart, had no necessity within Himself to marry, and had complete power over His own will. In this issue, as in all others, Jesus our Lord is the highest example of human

life. As a man He made Himself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake; as God He refused to 'marry the daughters of men', that there should be no mixing of the holy seed.

Except for the latter reason Paul could stand with his Lord, and declare his own steadfastness, freedom and power; he also chose celibacy, and made himself a eunuch for the kingdom's sake. He knew that some people could not receive nor walk after this example, as Jesus said, but he nevertheless exhorted all men to it. However, recognizing the true situation, and taking two things into consideration, he made allowance for the secondary position: (1) everyone has his proper gift and true calling of God: (2) there are very few who are not weak in this realm. It was right for him to remain celibate, but it may not be right for others. His proper gift

and calling demanded that he should be single in order to devote himself exclusively to the churches for which he laboured more abundantly than they all.

With this understanding he says 'let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband'. He was aware at that time of speaking by permission and not by commandment. Had he been speaking by commandment, he could have ordered nothing but the highest position: God never commands anything but that which is perfect. He does permit that which is of lesser condition though, and by commandment sets out orders for those who live within the married state. As in most other things, in marriage also there are to be found the higher and the lower positions.

Paul does not rhapsodize about the ideal state, but with realism speaks of four

eventualities: (1) departure, (2) putting away, (3) bound, (4) loosed. The first presumes a marriage relationship which has broken down, so that the wife leaves her husband; in that case she must either remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. The second concerns separation — a man must not put away his wife he says; if she wishes to go he may let her do so, but she may not be put out by him.

Thirdly, marriage is to be regarded as an unbreakable bond, even though the partners to it do not live together. Any intimate relationship, whether occasional or regular, with any other person, is adulterous. Fourthly to be loosed from the bond is: (1) to be divorced, or (2) to have had the marriage annulled for some reason, or (3) to have suffered the loss through death of the partner. His overall judgment in such cases is

that any persons so released should not seek remarriage. He gives his various reasons for this, chiefest of which is that the free person is better advantaged to devote his or her time more fully to the Lord's service. But he is not so much concerned over separation or divorce as about remarriage. Concerning this he does not make the forthright statements about it as does the Lord. In some aspects he is far more detailed, but in none of his commandments or judgments is there to be found one word of contradiction of the Lord's statements.

It may be possible for some to read Jesus' and Paul's words, and in the following manner construct a case for remarriage following divorce, the separated spouse being still alive. Pleading that he could not receive Jesus' word in Matthew 19 v.3-12, he could say 'I am not able to make myself a

eunuch'. He could then quote Paul as saying, it is better to marry than to burn', and reason, 'my wife has departed, I am no longer under bondage, the marriage bond is broken by her departure, I am therefore free to marry again'. Paul's words 'art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife; but and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned' could then be brought in to support the position, and the case is made.

This may appear a sound enough argument that God permits remarriage, but it cannot be presented with certainty. Its weakness lies in its total disregard of the known attitude of God and the Lord's uncompromising statements. He shows that God wants marriage to be as it was in the beginning; He set the pattern 'by making one woman for one man, apparently for all time. The argument does not take into

account the fact that the basis of 'the gospel is eternal love, its message is permanent reconciliation, its purpose total elimination of the great divorce; its strength lies in patience, its fame in longsuffering, and its success in endurance.

God, who allows divorce among His people for specified reasons, did not write out a bill of divorcement because of Israel's adultery against Himself, and only unwillingly permitted it for them on the grounds of hard-heartedness. Separation He allows within the bond of marriage; He allowed it within the bond of His marriage to Israel, but it is not permanent, so it is not divorce, else there could be no salvation.

God's method is to set the highest standard for Himself and man, make Himself the example of it, exhort people to attain unto it, and give the greatest rewards to those

who do so. This is what He did when He said through Paul, 'the husband of one wife'. He did not go on to say 'at a time', for this would presuppose the ratification of divorce and remarriage as the norm for the Church. This is why Paul saw separation and divorce as a reason for a person to become a eunuch and remain unmarried.

Seeing that Paul was legislating for all the saints with a view to the highest positions in the churches, to have said or implied or allowed people to think he meant 'one wife at a time' would have laid the offices open to all sorts of abuse. The present permissive state of society facilitates easy divorce; it does not recognize sacred vows. The world has legalized the breaking of marriage on grounds contrary to the mind and word of God. A man may therefore have as many wives as he desires, providing he has only

one at a time. In respect of marriage, an elder must live an exemplary life; Paul's cautionary word must not be misconstrued. He was not saying that the highest positions in the churches are to set forth this kind of legalized polygamy.

Marriage was instituted by God to set forth true unity, love, faithfulness, loyalty, patience, longsuffering, compassion, trust and mutual understanding. Elders are to be chosen with this in mind; they may not, by the simple contrivance of divorce and remarriage, have as many wives as they choose, one at a time. If the spirit of God's word is misunderstood and misinterpreted or ignored, all sorts of irregularities could be substituted for His original intentions. 'The husband of one wife' could even be made to mean that a single or celibate man could not be an elder, which idea is an absolute

absurdity. Yet upon the face of it, this is how the phrase could be misinterpreted and rigorously applied to the exclusion of men like the very apostle who wrote the instructions.

Paul was both an elder and a self-made eunuch for the kingdom, and without question this is the highest state of life from which to administer eldership. Jesus, the Head of the Church, was Himself that, but celibacy was not enforced on the Church. It is high, who can attain unto it? But in opening the office to men of lesser calling and attainments, the Lord did not intend it should be filled with those who have lived contrary to the Spirit of the Covenant.

Churches wishing to maintain the highest standards of the Church must understand that, however gifted or godly, or otherwise talented or suited a person may be, he has

disqualified himself from this office if he openly breaks the spirit of marriage or reconciliation. If according to civil law he is divorced against his wishes, he is blameless; he had no power to prevent it; let him hold office. But if he remarry while his wife is still alive, he must forfeit his position. He has not by the marriage suddenly lost his ability to rule the church well, but from his position of headship he has projected a wrong picture of the Lord. He has considered it well and made his choice; he has not sinned so much as shown and fulfilled desires and intentions contrary to the Head he represents. By remarriage he has openly confessed that he has regard more to his own physical needs than to the church's spiritual welfare, and if allowed to remain in office, testifies thereby that the Lord promotes and rewards that spirit.

By the phrase 'the husband of one wife' the Lord has declared His own faithfulness and eternal intention to remain faithful. In order rightly to display Him and describe His attitude to the Church it could be written with this addition 'for ever', for this is His Spirit and how it was in the beginning. Neither Paul nor Jesus was legislating for the world but for God's people and His Church. Except that we must not add to scripture and that marriage is only for this life, Paul might easily have written 'the husband of one wife for ever', for undoubtedly that is the Spirit of God in this matter.

If this should be considered a harsh judgment from God, let His dealings with Moses be an ensample to us. Upon one occasion, under great duress, Moses smote a rock in Horeb with the result that life-giving water gushed out. It was a miracle.

The needs of the people were satisfied; they were saved from death; their strivings ceased; that was exactly what God wanted apparently; the operation was a complete success, but because of it Moses was deprived of leadership and forfeited the promised land to which he had been marching for forty years.

It seems unfair that so gracious a man, deserving mention in Hebrews 11 as a man of faith, should be so rejected by God, but he was. The reason for this is as stated above: he had given to the people a totally wrong concept of the Lord. He disobeyed the word of God, and broke in principle a fundamental truth regarding the cross of Christ and the supply of the Spirit. Moses held a most responsible position in which he was entrusted to reveal the Lord to the people; the situation was grave; God did not

hesitate. Moses did not forfeit heaven for his folly; he did not lose his eternal salvation; he did forfeit his temporal office in Israel, God's 'church in the wilderness' though.

The beneficial result of his action was seemingly all that mattered to carnal Israel; it fully met their pressing bodily need, nevertheless he was out of God's order, for it denied eternal spiritual truth. Moses did not break the law he had given, nor fall into open sin, neither did he fail of his ability to rule or teach the people or perform miracles; he completely and irrevocably acted contrary to the principles of God and eternal life. Therefore he was deprived of his office; that was that.

It is precisely for this same reason that a man who remarries while his spouse is living ought to be debarred from any office he holds in the Church and certainly deposed

from eldership. Although there is a very great dissimilarity between Moses' defection and divorce and remarriage, (especially divorce for the purpose of remarriage) there is none between the reasons for God's rulings on both. It does not matter how fruitful or full of success a man's ministry may have been, or how blessed his remarriage may appear to be, or that he can still perform miracles, or that living water seems to flow from him still. These are not God's criteria for judgment; if a man irrevocably defects from basic principles governing the aspect of the eternal life his office and ministry is given him to display, he must suffer the consequences. Forgiveness for any sin or errors of judgment involved in it there surely is, but honour from God for it there surely is not. The example is wrong.

The whole subject of divorce and remarriage must be viewed through the eyes of Christ. In the last analysis Jesus' words on this or any subject are the final pronouncement on the matter. They are unambiguous and not uttered without taking into consideration the effect they would have on the Church. Not only has the Church been searched by His statements, the whole of Christendom has been affected by them. At the time He was commenting on Jewish practices supposedly grounded on Mosaic law, but He showed that instead of this, they were based on misinterpretations of it. He said that except for the cause of fornication, divorce was not allowed, and that remarriage while the divorced former partner was alive was adultery.

Moses allowed divorce in Israel. The bill of divorcement was regarded as annulment of

the marriage and responsibility for the divorced wife thereby ceased; so also did cohabitation. But Jesus said this was only because of their stony hearts, and nowhere does He or the scriptures say marriage is thereby dissolved. According to Jesus it is not: the implications of what He said are that the marriage still exists in God's sight. This is the only ground on which He could say remarriage is adultery. Putting away a spouse by divorce does not annul a marriage; it must only be regarded as permanent separation.

In God's eyes marriage is not by union in flesh, but by vow. How can divorce annul a vow? Couples may cease to live together and discontinue all relationships, but they cannot annul their vows taken before God. Therefore the expressions 'my former wife', 'my former husband' are anomalous; wives

and husbands are not made by flesh union, but by exchange of heartfelt promises freely given to each other as unto God.

The record of the unique conception of Jesus Christ illustrates this perfectly. Joseph, a just man, 'not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her (Mary) away privily'. But the angel said to him 'fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife', when as yet she was only espoused to him. The vow they had made to each other or which had been accepted in each other's behalf by some relative on either side, was regarded as binding. The virgin Mary was not yet Joseph's wife in flesh, but was regarded both by God and man as being so, though not actually married to him.

Jesus was correcting the decadent attitude toward marriage which had crept into Israel. Throughout their history they had suffered

many national defeats and had been carried away captive to other lands; even then, though living in their own land, they were under bondage to the Romans. From their successive captors and oppressors they had learned and adopted many things abhorred by God. Practices obnoxious in His sight had become acceptable in their eyes, not the least of these being marriage customs. Herod their king had been rebuked by John Baptist because he had his brother Philip's wife living with him as though she were his. The Romans had forbidden the Jews to apply capital punishment to anyone, so those who practised pre-marital fornication could not be stoned, neither could anyone who was taken in adultery.

By reason of Israel's sin, God's law had been brought into disrepute; in many points it was openly flouted and disobeyed. When Jesus

spoke His word on the matter, He had in mind eternal realities. He was not only pronouncing on the present conditions, but also declaring His uncompromising attitude toward original truth, and legislating for the future Church. He does not expect us to seek to find a way around His words — the New Covenant is not in word but in Spirit. What Babylon or Rome thought or legislated on the matter made no difference to Him — He spoke God's mind.

Similarly what modern governments legislate about marriage is immaterial to eternal truth; what do they know about that? When Jesus said 'as it was in the beginning', He was revealing the perfect will of God. He who is the Beginning and the Ending has spoken the first and last word on the subject, 'it was not so'. That should be sufficient for the churches, and elders above

all men should accept it. If they wish to act contrary to it they should admit to breaking the spirit of the words, and breaking with the Spirit of truth on the point. To do so is tantamount to, and should be regarded as, serving notice of resignation upon grounds of unfitness.

The early Church understood Jesus' attitude perfectly. When Paul wrote a letter to the church at Rome, the seat of world dominion and authority, he included in it a short section using the figure of marriage to illustrate deep and important spiritual truth. He was very wise. He did not inveigh against the authority invested by God in 'the powers that be'. He knew that in many cases they abused their office and accepted and practised abominable things against God and His laws, but he also knew the principle of power greater than these powers that be,

viz. 'the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus'. He said it had made him free from the law of sin and death that he should not walk after the flesh but after the Spirit. Therefore, skilfully avoiding an open declaration against Roman law, he revealed the truth for every believing eye to see.

He opens his seventh chapter with as wholehearted a statement upon the subject as it is possible to find; 'I speak to them that know law', he says, and commences with an assertion that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives. Saying so, he has already made his point; the marriage figure which follows is only the illustration of it. His reasoning is clear; everything is governed and controlled by law; the law of the land binds a woman to the law of the husband. As long as the husband lives she is bound by him to the law of the land governing the

union contracted between them. In turn this binds her to her husband, so that 'if while her husband liveth she become (Gk.) to another man she shall be called an adulteress'.

This citation is not concerning a bigamous marriage — she is not to be called a bigamist as would happen if she remarried while still married to her husband. If the husband had died she would have been loosed from the law of her husband, which would have loosed her from the law of the land governing remarriage. The spiritual law of husband is binding over the entire period of his life — it cannot be broken by divorce, so going to live with another man could not be called marriage; it could only be adultery. The one thing that could prevent her from being an adulteress is the death of the husband.

The importance of this is sharply emphasized when Paul draws a spiritual parallel between it and Christ and His bride, the Church. The husband role is fulfilled by Christ. In the first instance he is to be regarded as the old (man) husband to whom the soul is married. In the second instance He is the new (man) husband to whom the soul is wed. The only way a person can be released from marriage to the old man is by his death. She cannot be divorced from him in order to marry the new man; that would be adultery; such a state just does not exist; God has not created it; it is an impossibility. She cannot still be married to the old and marry the new at the same time, that would be spiritual bigamy and presumes the existence of spiritual polygamy.

The only way is through death. When Christ died by substitution He embodied the old or

first husband in that act. When that happened, she was no longer bound by law to her husband, she became dead to it when he became dead to her. She could then marry the new husband-man and come under the law of her (new) husband who binds her to the law of God. She is then his legal wife and cannot be called a bigamist or an adulteress.

By this means God has made His attitude to divorce and remarriage in flesh quite clear; it cannot be, because it has no existence in spiritual law — it is an impossibility. The only thing that can break spiritual law is death. God cannot approve of divorce; how then can He countenance remarriage? As long as a man lives, the law has dominion over him; he cannot be divorced from the law. As long as both partners to the marriage vow live, they are bound by the law of marriage (law

of husband, or wife as the case may be). This law has been in existence from the beginning, and is unchanged to this day. Moses suffered divorce but never sanctioned remarriage, and Jesus outlaws it altogether. Paul declares its illegality and reveals its spiritual impossibility to the Romans, discourages it to the Corinthians and legislates against it in his letters to Timothy.

The phrase 'husband of one wife' is straight out of God's heart; it refers to the law of marriage. In Bible times it was always thought of in masculine terms, 'the law of husband', because everything turned around and moved as from the responsibility of the male. In these days when women have equal standing with men in marriage status, it may be thought of in terms of male or female. Paul who was far from being 'avant garde' in

his attitude to human institutions, advanced the idea of parity when he said that the man has not power over his own body, nor has the woman power over hers.

Nevertheless, avoiding the ancient abuse of masculine superiority and rejecting the implications of modern 'women's liberation' movements, it is best to use Bible terminology when thinking on this subject, and speak of 'the law of husband'. The reason for this is the fact that all is based on God; He is the great husband. Marriage is an outworking and demonstration of the truth of God in human relationships.

The flesh union is primarily a demonstration of spiritual union. Marriage, because it is in the flesh, is not a uniting of two people in the same way as God is a unity, for God is Spirit, and flesh cannot unite and become one as God is one. Nevertheless the vows

exchanged between two people for the purpose of marriage are utterances from their spirits, which unite in this one thing: 'I will'. That is regarded by God as being the unifying factor, and the flesh union which follows is the demonstration of it. The result or fruit of that is children, which are the outworking and proof of the union. They are the unity of life; in them the two seeds become one, the two bloods become one, the two bodies of flesh become one, the two natures become one; they are the indissoluble blending of two persons into one; two lives make one. To destroy that union the life must be slain; all the time the person is alive the union cannot be broken — husband and wife are united in the child; the marriage cannot be dissolved. This is why divorce is impossible in God's law; separation of two people so that flesh union

can no longer take place is regrettably allowable, but by the science of being, divorce cannot be.

God wove the law of His own being into humanity. To break it there would be to break it in His mind and will, which is impossible. It therefore follows that remarriage following divorce is entirely mythical. Among men it is common, but it is only another name for adultery, for it is a form of bigamy, and is incipient polygamy. Christ said it was adultery, and Paul called it that and said it should be called that. This that is called remarriage is only a fantasy — it has no basis in spiritual truth. By their laws of convenience, men have created a state which in reality cannot be; and men are existing in it. Therefore any human state or civilization which has legalized divorce and remarriage has inworked the seeds of

destruction into its system, and must die of the disease. But it is not in God's being, nor is it in His system, the Church.

The holy three live together in holy wedlock. Not only are they one in being, they are one by common consent; their wills and minds and love are one. There neither is nor shall be nor ever can be divorce between them — they are eternally one. At Calvary they came as near to divorce as could ever possibly be; the testimony to the awfulness of that moment was wrung from the lips of the young husband of the cross, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'

He hung forsaken because there could be no divorce. God would not divorce His ancient people — He would not cast off His people 'whom He foreknew'. He 'forsook them for a small moment', that with great mercies He might gather them up, but He did not

divorce or cast them off, nor has He forgotten them. Listen to the cry of His heart in Hosea, 'how shall I give thee up?' ..... 'Return unto Me for I have loved thee'. The fact that His Son was born of Mary the virgin of Israel proved that God still was married to His wife.

Hard, cruel, murderous adulteress that Israel was, and still is, to God, He has not cast her off. The episode of forsakenness at the cross revealed the heart of God to perfection on this matter. Because of the sin He bore, and the embodiment of sin that He became, and the man of sin He was made, Jesus was forsaken there, but only for a small moment. Soon He was saying with all His former confidence, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit'.

There had been no divorce, just a necessary separation, a period of forsakenness —

remarriage had not been necessary. Divorce is a breaking of a union, a dissolution of a bond, a cutting off of a member, a casting away from a person's presence, an excommunication from life, a death, an end. There was no breakage to the union of God at the cross, no dissolution of the bond between the holy three, Jesus was not cut off from membership in the Godhead, nor was He cast away from Father's presence. He was not excommunicated, only temporarily excluded as was the leper until cleansed; His spirit did not die, nor was the grave His end. His body slept awhile, then He rose rested, to seek a wife, espousing her to Himself with vows and promises, by blood and spirit and undying love — a holy and eternal covenant never to be broken — saying, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee'.

The work of the cross is eternal, working as in retrospect in relationship to Jehovah's wife, Israel, and as in prospect in connection with the bride, the Lamb's wife, and is the revealed principle of everlasting love and righteousness. Spiritual union of persons of one nature by will is indissoluble — there is no divorce in God, and there is none in the Church.

It follows then that divorce and remarriage cannot be tolerated in elders. They above all are given the position in trust from the Lord to teach spiritual truth as it is in Jesus, and seek out pasture for the flocks. They must not attempt to feed lambs and sheep on anything else but eternal love. Therefore their own bond of law must be beyond rupture, dissolution or death. Whatever the test to them, marriage must be a finality.

6 —ELDERSHIP AND AUTHORITY

A further point ought to be made here. It is regretfully true that in many quarters a totally wrong concept of power is in evidence, and authoritarianism has taken the place of true authority. When this is so, it is often common to find misapplication of Bible truth concerning installation of elders and deacons. Reading the Word on this subject, we find that power to elect to office is broad-based in the Church. There are apparently three sources of choice: (1) God, (2) the apostles, (3) the people.

As we have seen, God chose the first elders; this election is idealistic and follows the pattern of things in heaven. As is shown in the case of the original apostle-elders of the Church, elders are given by God. Jesus said of His twelve apostles that His Father gave them to Him, and as far as the Church is

concerned that settles the matter. God's choice is first, final and binding.

The next method is election by an apostle or his deputy. Paul either ordained elders in the new churches which sprang up under his ministry or directed others, such as Timothy, to do so. Except for the great wisdom granted him, Paul would have been placing these infant churches at great risk, for in such short time how could it possibly have been known of what calibre the men were? The apostle was commissioned to do what he should do, and to discharge his duty faithfully as unto the Lord; this he did. Unfortunately his action has been wrongly interpreted by some and promoted to a position of precedence above his intentions.

God did not intend His servant's action to be regarded as a precedent; it is not an example of the only correct way to appoint

men into office in the churches for the rest of time. What Paul did is an instance of a way, not an example of the way. Expediency played a part in Paul's actions. Men had to be ordained into office so soon after their regeneration because he himself was a man moving about speedily in his own office and commission. He was also under persecution from the Jewish authorities, so he did not usually stay for any great length of time in one place. Wherever he went he preached under pressure, with much labour, until a company was gathered out and a church came into being. By that time he had often outstayed his welcome, and found it prudent to depart in haste, leaving behind an infant church to fend for itself entirely without official leaders. Whenever this happened, he would later return to that church and ordain elders there; this he did

as much of necessity as of policy. Another of his methods was to appoint men such as Timothy or Titus to be his deputies and act with his authority to ordain elders or deacons as necessity arose.

It is sometimes thought that Paul made these appointments entirely by apostolic authority, by means of spiritual gifts, without consultation with anyone. Of course this is quite possible, and under the circumstances may even appear very probable; nevertheless it is most unlikely that he did so, for it is absolutely contrary to the spirit of the body. This method is one which generally appeals to persons with strong authoritarian tendencies, and is propounded upon the premise that the Church, being a theocracy, should not function by democratic principles. To such persons the idea of a greatly gifted man

stepping in and selecting and installing men into office as he will is most appealing, but it finds very little support in scripture.

By the time Paul was added to the Church and put in office, the church at Jerusalem was already well established, and being strongly administered. by the apostle-elders. Since the day of Pentecost, there had been no additions to this select band of men. At that time there was no talk among them of governmental authority; everything was bound up in the law of growth or natural development as it should be. Right from its natal day the growth of the Church was phenomenal — the Lord had been daily adding saved ones to it. He was its Head; except in the natural course of ministry no-one else sought to assert authority lest they usurp His.

Before Pentecost the apostles had made an excursion into the realm of election and ordination. their motives had been pure enough at the time, and the method they adopted was one familiar to all Jews — they cast lots. Perhaps they thought that they could adapt God's ancient order to fulfill their own wishes; it is to be hoped they were not merely following the common practice of gambling, as when the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' coat, but it is doubtful whether the choice came out of the bosom of the High Priest Melchisedec. Jesus had not selected them by casting lots, and the result of their lottery was not outstandingly noteworthy to say the least.

The fact that this method was not used again indicates that God did not approve of it. In any case it was pre-Pentecost, that is before the Church of Jesus Christ on earth

was born. The coming of the Spirit with newness of life taught the apostles differently. Until then they were only apostles. When they became elders as well, they acted spiritually, as men ought to act in the Church. From that time onward they accepted their new responsibility, and therefore when the need arose they moved in an entirely new way.

As may be expected, the growth of the Church in those days so greatly increased the workload on the apostles that it became well-nigh intolerable. It is not surprising then, that with all the praying, preaching and ministering which continuously absorbed their attention, some of the more menial tasks were neglected. Because of this, sadly enough, though perhaps justifiably, murmurings arose among the people, especially as the oversight seemed

to some to be not without a degree of partiality.

These murmurings were not necessarily sinful, for by the inadvertent neglect which caused them, some folk were going hungry. This was neither God's intention, nor the will of the apostle-elders, but it revealed that the task was too great to be borne solely by twelve pairs of human shoulders. Therefore the necessity arose to correct the trouble. They met this difficulty by deciding to appoint seven men who should take charge of that particular branch of the church's daily ministrations, thereby releasing themselves for the most important spiritual duties.

When putting their decisions into practice, the apostles suggested to the church that they should choose the men they wanted for the task. The apostles refrained from

selecting whom they thought were worthy; instead they allowed, even encouraged — perhaps commanded — the people to have whom they wished. The apostles were not yet called elders, though they may by that time have been recognized as such. But whatever their public recognition then, with wisdom and maturity and humility which marks true elders, they gave guidance to the people about their choice, and having set the standard, left the selection to the whole church.

Benefitting from the advice, the church made their selection and brought the chosen seven to the elders, who in turn showed their approval of the people's wishes by ordaining the men into office. The apostles saw two things very clearly, and firmly insisted upon them: (1) selecting was the prerogative of the people as

representing the mind of God; (2) ordination was exclusively the work of the apostle-elders as representing the will of God and the people.

Here two other points emerge which may not have been given sufficient consideration in time past: (1) properly led and taught, a church is every bit as capable as apostles of making right choices, and in doing so also makes the apostles', and God's choice: (2) the people chose men to be to them as the apostle-elders — that is as God's representatives. It was as though the apostles had said 'who would you choose to take our places in this particular field of service?' Fully considered, this rather limits the range of choice, but God had produced them and the church had selected them, so the apostles ordained them. Here is wisdom indeed.

The Church is the grave of all authoritarianism and officiousness. Usurpation of powers from the body of Christ under pretext of office-bearing is a cowardly action. It is by no means a chronic condition though, and can easily be remedied by the churches, and should be, lest wrongly submitting to false authority, the body weaken itself. 'Recognition', a much-used word in these days, must be two-way as instanced here. By appointing those men, the apostles took a certain amount of responsibility for the deacons — they were their representatives.

All of this reveals that with regard to office bearing it is people who finally make calling and election sure, for who can doubt that the men were already God's elect? Those seven are regarded as the first to hold the privileged office of deacon in the Church. On

them first was laid the duty of exalting the word 'deacons' of common usage into a high and holy calling. We should also note how large a part expediency played in what is now called by some 'Church Order'. No wonder Paul said he 'took pleasure in necessities'. Far from 'as it was in the beginning', so much of the order in modern churches is an attempt by slavish minds to copy scriptural patterns for the sake of them rather than because of necessity. It is a feature of God's methods that His election always becomes apparent at the right moment and at the point of expediency.

This is nowhere more clearly shown than at the time when it became necessary for Paul to ordain and install elders into the churches of Asia Minor. The situations which arose there absolutely compelled him to put men in charge of the flocks; they needed proper

oversight and permanent pastoral leadership and he could not give it. But, although expediency played a large part in his actions on these occasions, it would be utter folly to assume that circumstances alone governed his decisions. There is no record that he consulted God or any person about his actions at that time, yet it can hardly be doubted that he did what he did under divine instruction. Certain it is that he had God's approval, for later, in separate letters to Timothy and Titus, he charged them both to do as he had done.

If he had been wrong in his actions or methods, the Spirit of the Lord would surely have corrected him so that he should not repeat and perpetuate error by commandment. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction

in righteousness with a view to perfection. Therefore we can be confident that the instructions given by Paul about eldership are one hundred per cent correct.

It is certain that in doing what he did he followed apostolic example, for, as we have seen, before ever the need for elders arose in Asia Minor, the church at Jerusalem had also found itself in need. The apostles had reacted to their problem then in much the same way as did Paul later. The procedure in each case was perhaps not identical, but the result was the same, namely that men were ordained into official positions in the Church.

It is just possible that until these ordinations took place at Jerusalem, the offices of elder and deacon were not recognized in the Church. Apostles, prophets and teachers they certainly had from the beginning, but there is no evidence of evangelist, pastor,

elder or deacon until much later. Even then they do not appear together, as when the Lord chose and named the apostles. The likelihood is that all the offices later to be bestowed upon individual members of the body of Christ were already concentrated in the apostolic band from which all sprang. In fact it could hardly be otherwise, for to those men the Lord committed Himself and all the abilities and offices He held on earth. Between them the original apostles were prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, elders and deacons.

Without question the twelve acted as deacons during the Lord's lifetime on earth. This is very obvious, for it was they who waited upon the multitudes when the Lord miraculously provided them with food. However, the word used by the Lord in John 15 is not the usual one used for deacon in

the New Testament, but the one meaning bond-slave. Until then apparently He had referred to them as slaves — now He shows them that they are His friends also. Shortly after this, at Pentecost, Jesus' friends were put in trust with the gospel, fully equipped with all the gifts and ministries of the Spirit relevant to their new commission.

At that time these men became the nucleus of the Church, the founder members of His Body. Their duty was to commit to others what the Lord had first committed to them. It is thus obvious why the Lord did not found the Church complete with all the offices filled by separate people. At first the apostles were filling all the various offices themselves, but when circumstances demanded and needs justified a change of method they unhesitatingly delegated some of their duties to others. They dared not lay

aside their apostleship; instead they ordained specially elected men to the more menial tasks they had been doing, and granted them official recognition.

Should it be held that there is a difference between the methods used by the apostles for ordination of deacons in Jerusalem and those used by Paul to install elders in Asia Minor, this should not be made to mean that ordination into the two offices is to be approached in different ways. Any difference of method, if it exists at all, has not been made in order to mark the superiority of the one above the other. It is not to be supposed that an elder is in any degree greater than a deacon, and that he must therefore be elected by an apostle, while a deacon may be chosen by the church. If this notion be held, a careful reading of the appropriate scriptures will at once reveal its absurdity,

for the qualifications required of men chosen to fill either office are practically the same.

At this point it may be of some help to discuss the reason for the different methods of installation which may be involved here. If there is such a difference, it may be because of the fact that the churches involved were so entirely different. Perhaps this difference was partly the result of geography and nationality, as well as of spirituality, to say nothing of the time factor involved. When the deacons were chosen, the church at Jerusalem was already well established. At least twelve apostles ministered among them with great spiritual gift; blessings abounded and numbers increased daily. It is recorded of these that they continued daily in the apostles' doctrine and prayers and

communion; the Spirit of God was working among them mightily.

This church was just about the most blessed and privileged and well-taught company of people that has ever been on the earth. Therefore when complaints arose about neglect of widows among them, they were well able to take part in the electoral processes to which they were invited. The excellency and expediency of it were manifest to all; the selection was made to the apostles' approval and the ordination of men for the office effected to everybody's satisfaction; the election was manifestly of God. The church at Jerusalem was made up of a people sufficiently established and taught of God for the task.

This was not so with their Asian brethren. They lived far from Jerusalem and, except by report, knew nothing of the initial

outpouring there. When finally the good news reached Asia Minor, the first church at Jerusalem had been established for well over a decade. The Gentiles had not been so blessed as the Jews; they had had no Jesus, no scriptures, no apostles; they were hopeless, helpless and without God. Moreover God had waited a long time before raising up Paul and sending him to them, and when he came, he only visited; he did not stay long. He was in full pursuit of a mission which embraced the world, of which Asia Minor was only one small part. With such handicaps they were neither able nor expected to make choices for themselves in the same way as was the church at Jerusalem.

This could be advanced as a reason why the Gentile churches were not allowed to select or nominate their own candidates for office,

but we do not know whether or not Paul sought the co-operation of the churches in Asia Minor on the matter. We do know however that he ordained elders among them, and perhaps it is better to believe that he did so in much the same manner as his brother apostles had done when installing the deacons at Jerusalem.

Following his new birth and before departure from Antioch upon his mission, Paul had visited Jerusalem. Whilst there, he would have had ample opportunity to find out all he may have felt he ought to know about church order. Being the man he was, it is almost certain that he had learned all about the offices in the church and the way they had been filled, so that when he finally set out upon his missionary journey he was therefore well-equipped with the knowledge of original and alternative methods of

election, selection and ordination in the Church. They were already displayed in the principles and practices of the churches at Jerusalem and Antioch.

Paul was no mere innovator, nor was he a dictator; he was a man of God, and through him the Lord established and ordered churches according to His eternal purpose. Nevertheless, although this is true, Paul adopted the same policy of expediency which is observable in the Church from the beginning. The conclusive evidence that God's time has come is unavoidable need. When something must be done, the Spirit of God is at work; it is His elect time and will. The person of His election is somewhere to be found, and should be installed into office.

We see then that before Paul's advent, the original elders had already established methods of procedure for the churches. It is

refreshing to note that these men of sacred calling did not give rein to their own spirits with a great display of gifts, or act in an authoritarian manner. They did not do it all themselves — as clearly as we do they saw that election is of God. They apparently also believed that ordination must be by their will and ministry. But they insisted that selection must be by the people.

In the absence of any direct word upon the matter, from such practice we may not be mistaken in concluding that theocracy works upon democratic principles in the Church. One of the words used by the Holy Ghost in the Acts of the Apostles, when referring to indication of choice or show of approval, means 'to signify by raising the hand'. This word is perhaps only used idiomatically, but it deliberately introduces the idea of corporate action and is a far cry from casting

lots or prophesying a person into position. It is the most healthy of states, showing that equality of spiritual perception is possible to all men in the Church.

The original apostles did not attempt to usurp the office and prerogatives of the Holy Spirit working in the whole body of believers. These men realized that they were setting a precedent. They knew that they, of all men, were witnesses specially chosen by Christ to be fellow foundation-stones with Him of the Church. They and He knew that as they interpreted and applied truth, so it would remain for all time. Imagine then with what care they chose their words and took action upon this occasion — they knew they were setting an example and creating a precedent which in time could hardly escape being taken as a law of procedure for the whole Church.

An unmistakable conclusion emerges, namely that to hold a position in Christ's body, officers must be seen to be worthy of it. They must be chosen of God willing His will through the entire company of people. This is not to say that the voice of the people is the voice of God, but in the Church, 'thus saith the Lord' should be 'thus saith the people' too. Unity is more easily kept where the policy of unanimity is practised; entire sanctity of the whole body is a basic principle in the Church. Full understanding of this fact with all its implications in this matter, as well as in any other, must be grasped by all, especially by its officers. Reading Paul's letters it becomes obvious that he of all men knew this; it is hardly likely therefore that, when installing elders, he would have departed from time-

honoured methods associated with ordination.

All things being equal, it may be taken for granted that if a man is chosen of God, at least all spiritual people, if not everybody, will recognize it, and if asked would say so. This point cannot be over-stressed in the churches, for the man appointed to eldership is a man ordained to rule among his brethren. People will gladly submit to, and be guided by and obey those in whom they recognize the qualities required for this kind of leadership. An authoritarian attitude is unacceptable in the Church. Where people gather together they are drawn by God, and submission cannot be forced; if it is, it will be subversion, and will result in submersion. Obedience will be gladly rendered when in all elders men and women plainly see 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and

forever'. The unchanging Christ must be visible, available, accessible to all. The Church must be able to hear, see, handle Jesus in every elder, then they will be able to trust the one to whom they are commanded to submit.

As has been pointed out, rule in the Church has nothing to do with the administration of civil law, but must co-exist with and be subservient to it. Nevertheless, beneficent as it may be on the whole, there may be exceptional periods in the life of a nation when the Church of Jesus Christ may need to act contrary to national policy. Should such a situation ever arise, laws concerning an individual's behaviour may not be made about it, either by a local church or by some central ruling body. Instead every man must be urged to obey the principles, practices and plainest statements of the New

Testament and keep his conscience clear before God. This is proper procedure, perfectly in accord with the apostles' doctrine and behaviour.

In these things an elder bears great responsibility. His qualification to continue to hold office and bear rule in a church will be greatly tested by such circumstances. He will be asked his opinion and be expected to give judgment in the matter, and must do so honestly without regard to the cost to himself or to others. The elder must take full cognizance of the results to be expected should the brother or sister accept his advice, and must not shrink from instructing everyone to put personal allegiance to Christ before and above every other claim. Under all circumstances an elder must show that his own and everybody else's responsibilities are to: (1) the Lord Jesus Christ, (2) the

Church universal, (3) the local church. Therefore before he takes office, an elder, though apt to teach, must be aware that in all things example is better than precept.

The thirteenth chapter of Hebrews twice uses the word 'rule'. Although no direct mention is made of eldership, the writer undoubtedly has this office in mind. He is obviously not speaking of civil rulers, for they do not watch 'for your souls'; they are too busy attending to their business. Saints are exhorted to 'obey them that have the rule over you' — a very strong word indeed. But this must not be construed to mean that saints are to render blind obedience to anyone, whether it be elder or nation. That kind of obedience is not obligatory, and certainly must not be enforced under pain of excommunication from the body.

Officiousness, authoritarianism and imperious bearing are not to be confused with Christlikeness. They are the complete opposite of that wonderful nature. The current notion that eldership confers authority from Christ to make decisions for individual church members is erroneous to a degree. It is false to deduce that because eldership involves rule in a church, it also takes away people's personal responsibility to Christ. Personal responsibility to make decisions before God is both a basic freedom and a basic necessity in the churches. To rob a man of that in the name of eldership is abuse of office. An elder must not only know where his duties commence but also where they end. Eldership does not involve organization of people's private lives, disposal of their properties, direction of families and control of individuals' finances.

Paul told Timothy to study to be quiet and mind his own business, and Peter says, 'not a busybody in other men's matters'. Any man or group of men aspiring to eldership must behave according to these scriptures. It must be thoroughly understood and taught that guidance and rule within the Church is given from Christ the Head directly to every member. Therefore all ministry given to a man, whether counsel or advice or direction or command, must be subject to and in accordance with that. If it be found contrary to the voice which speaks within, it is either satanic or carnal.

Election to office does not automatically confer the mind and wisdom of the Head upon any man. Before he is elected the man must reveal in his life that he either has these, or is of such calibre that he can humble himself to receive them. An elder

has no authority to order a man to do anything in his own home, with his own family, or with his own goods. He has no right to order him where to go, where to live, or what to do. An elder's authority is to do with the assembly; every man must be encouraged and taught by example to be the elder in his own home. Usurpation of that position by a church elder is scandalous. Advice, counsel, assistance may be given upon request, but must never be enforced over an individual's conscience. An elder may be a wonderful counsellor and a prince of peace, but he must not dare to attempt to be the mighty God.

It is not without intent, as well as being a logical conclusion to the whole, that at the end of the chapter we are commended to 'that great Shepherd of the sheep who was brought again from the dead', and 'the

blood of the everlasting covenant'. With these words we are reminded that the Lord Jesus Himself taught far more by example than by precept.

What Christ is and was and did is of far more importance and of greater value than all His words. In fact it was only who and what Jesus was in Himself, plus His deeds, that made His words of any eternal worth; all the sheep, including the elders, are to follow His example. This is why the members of the flock are exhorted to follow the faith of their elders, for it is assured and to be expected that these are already following the faith of Jesus Christ.

An elder must realize that the flock is especially watching him in times of national crisis. Responsibility lies heavily upon him. He cannot then retire behind the facade of 'every man for himself', for a man's faith is

his life. How he lives is important at all times, but more so during times when great crises and disasters engulf a nation. His responsibility is very great then, for unless he sets the perfect example at that time, he will lead men and women into error and sin. At times of national and international upheaval he must understand and see vividly that his calling and ordination is to the whole Church international and universal, as well as to the local church. Even though he be unpopular and may suffer in consequence, he must place personal allegiance to Jesus Christ first; he has been chosen by the Lord precisely for that reason. If a man breaks down at this point he has no right to be an elder.

Peter's attitude when on trial before the council is so clear that we are left in no doubt about what he thought. Under threat

of punishment and with the possibility of ultimate death hanging over him, he said 'whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God judge ye, for we cannot but speak ....', and again, 'we ought to obey God rather than men'. He was then an elder as well as an apostle, and absolutely fearless. By this example he led the Church in a sure, unmistakable path. Therefore the apostolic advice he gives in his first epistle is invaluable — 'submit yourselves to every ordinance of men for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of them that do well .... if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully, this is thankworthy .... Christ also suffered for us,

leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps, who did no sin'.

All submission to men, even though they represent the 'powers that be' ordained of God, must be secondary, not primary. Their duty is to make laws under God; they must not legislate against His Church or His will, and should they do so, incur His wrath. With this knowledge, an elder must so live and work and speak that his life is at all times an example of faith. He must live a life which is a light for his fellow men, and set forth the Christ for men to follow and the Church to obey.

Occasionally throughout the New Testament the phrase 'tradition of the elders' occurs. It draws attention to a solemn fact, namely that elders set traditions in churches. Churches become what their elders are. That is the intention of God; it is also a

completely unavoidable result. As earlier pointed out, elders should be seated around the throne of God with the Lamb and the eternal covenant and the book in full view. Of all people they should have understanding of heavenly, spiritual events and be able also to lead the praise and worship of the saints. Their spirits, if not their bodies, should be prostrate before Him that sits upon the throne, and this should be evident to the gathered saints. Therefore if a man be severely inhibited or bound up within himself, if he never or seldom takes part in open worship, or does not minister in spiritual gifts, he may not be an elder; his attitude is helping to set a tradition — his presence and demeanour are vital.

Money, social standing, business acumen or executive ability must never be considered as being of such consequence in the

churches that men are elected to positions because of them. Elders do not obtain a good report by such things. A careerist automatically excludes himself from possibility of office in the Church — he is far too busy and involved to properly care for the flock of God. An elder must believe that his eldership is his first and highest duty and privilege. If he does not, God has not called him. He must also have a shepherd-heart to take on pastoral care; for this he will (if married) need a wife who fully supports his ministry, and runs the home for this purpose.

7 — PILLARS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

There is a further important matter concerning eldership which ought to be fully considered and understood before we conclude. Its importance cannot be over-emphasized, for it covers the whole sphere of church growth. It is observable from scripture that in the beginning when the Church made such rapid growth, its missionary programme was carried out chiefly by elders. The two men who were chiefly engaged in this outgoing ministry were Peter and Paul. That these two were apostles emphasizes the point still further, for as we know the title means 'sent one'. It appears that when the Lord chose these men to become the first elders of the Church, He did so fully intending that they should not remain stationary in a settled

place. It has been generally considered that James remained at Jerusalem, but of the others little is known, save that they were moved out by the Lord. The church was added to by Him as the original elders set out to obey His command to go into all the world.

It has been a fault common to the modern churches that they have kept their elders and sent out their youngsters. The older, maturer and more experienced men have stayed at home while young, inexperienced men have sought obediently to fulfill God's commission to evangelize the world. So ignorant have we been of God's methods, that seldom, if ever, has a protesting voice been raised against such practice.

Time and tradition have honoured this plain reversal of tactics, conferring upon it lives, labours and money in the vain belief that it

is God's will. Societies have been set up and young people have been recruited and trained for the so-called 'mission field', and sent out with the best of intentions. Good people have laboured and sacrificed with zeal and self-denial to fulfill a half-forgotten commission in the hope that the gospel may be proclaimed in some 'far corner of the world'. Their motive is highly commendable, and their achievements great, but parallel with their successes runs the story of their failure also. The fault does not lie with them — they have shown great devotion to the Lord and shall have their reward in that day. The cause of failure lies rooted deeper down than that, in the uncomprehension of the entire Church; we have not properly grasped the ways of God.

Taking God Himself as our example, we see immediately that His approach to, and

involvement in, world redemption was from an entirely different angle from ours. He did not send a novice, a beginner; He sent the Beginning. He did not send a youngster, but the Elder, the Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher, Jesus, whose goings forth had been from eternity. When at last on earth, the Lord, at twelve years of age, was highly qualified and full of zeal to be about His Father's business. His desire and will and call to do so were all plainly evident then. What need had He to wait?

Many reasons could be advanced for the delay, which withheld Him from His greater ministries while He laboured for a further eighteen years at a carpenter's bench. Among the chiefest of these is the fact that He had come to build His Church; for this He had to be an elder. That He was still a young man when He laid down His life as the great

foundation stone in no way invalidated His claim to eldership; He was, and still is, the mature elder. As has already been stated, quality is of more importance in this matter than time.

Of Jesus' quality there is no doubt; He was what He was at twelve, but the Lord waited another twenty years or more before He attempted to build His Church. Surely this must be accepted as the pattern; there cannot be a substitute better than this. Why then has the Church on earth devised some other scheme?

The answer to this lies chiefly in the Church's failure to grasp the fundamental principle of the cross. But more than this, also for centuries it has never fully understood God's methods. A great deal of this is due to our littleness of faith and lack of insight. We wrongly speak of 'the foreign field', and do

so because that is how we think of the world. According to the country in which we live we speak of 'the home field' and 'the foreign field'.

The Bible has no such classifications as these. Instead the Lord said 'the field is the world'. He called no part of it 'foreign'; it is one. By inference He alluded to other 'folds', but not to other fields. We ought therefore to re-align our thinking with the Lord's, for unless we do so, we cannot help but continue in error. We must see the whole world as a mission field, including our own particular locality, and proceed to preach the gospel in it.

The general approach to this on the part of many has been either to ignore the injunction, or else to present the challenge to the young people of the church. This mentality has developed partly because of

the unwillingness of the various societies to accept the risk of sending out people of advanced years. This is quite an understandable situation, certainly justifiable and highly commendable as a sensible alternative to the first intention of God. But it is not what He initiated at the beginning. His method is far better, namely wholesale acceptance of the fact that it is the work of the whole Church to evangelize the whole world.

Side by side with this there must come about a totally new approach to 'missionary' preaching. At present this is all too frequently aimed at youth, and geared to accepted concepts based upon texts emphasizing a 'missionary call'. There are plenty of these in scripture, and their proper use is valid in the whole context of church growth, but to over-emphasize them is to

court disaster and foster the error. There must also be a return to the pattern revealed in the New Testament.

It is an amazing thing that the original elder-apostles were both foundation and head of the local church. Of the universal Church on earth and in heaven Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, and also the headstone of the corner. Foundation and Head, He reproduces His faculties and functions in others that He calls to office according to His will. So it is that elders in their office and measure are called upon to be both foundation and head in the churches they serve.

What they must not do in regard to expansion is to develop the mentality which may be expressed something like this: 'I am an elder here; I have been called by God to become a pillar in this church. therefore I cannot, must not move from this position. I

will remain here; you go, I will pray for you, support you .... etc. etc.' Instead an elder must present himself wholly to God, undergo a complete transformation by mental renewal, and be prepared to move on. He is at the head, but if in obedience to God he goes out to others as he should, he will become a foundation. God will build something upon him. He will then progress from being 'a pillar of the local church', to being 'a pillar in the House of God.'

God's intention, as first revealed in His own Son, is that the move out for expansion and growth in the Church should be from the top. This is obviously the right way, and if the qualifications formerly reviewed be found in a man, he is perfectly fitted for the work. But beyond this, it also follows that if elders were to move off from headship of the local church and go out from the local

church, younger men within the church would find more room to develop into full stature. These in turn would become elders, and following the example set them by their elders, would themselves go out into the world with the gospel.

This is a vast topic, needing further expansion, but may only be treated here in relationship to our theme. But in so far as eldership is related to missionary vision and drive, the whole subject needed to be touched upon. The Church is a missionary Church during this age. It is the body of its missionary Head, the Lord Jesus: eldership and headship are one. The head must be the first to go. Let us return to the Lord's plan. We shall find it as workable today as in the day of its inception.