

LEADERSHIP IN CONGREGATIONS WITHOUT ELDERS (1)

One of our readers sometime ago suggested that we do an article on the subject of “Leadership in Congregations without Elders.” He suggested, and I agree, that most discussions on congregational leadership primarily had to do with elders. Most of us would agree that the need for God-approved leadership in congregations without elders should be a high priority.

It would be difficult to over emphasize the importance of leadership within the Lord’s church. “Unto [God] be glory in the church” (Eph 3:21). She is the manifestation of His “manifold wisdom”; she came into being and now exists “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:10-11). This being the case, we should know that God’s all-sufficient word (2 Tim. 3:16-17) will provide us with needed instructions in regard to leadership in His church, even in instances where local churches lack qualified men to serve as elders.

While I by no means claim to be a super authority on the above subject, I have learned some things from the study of God’s word and by having worked with congregations both with and without elders. Since I started preaching, about 53 years ago, I’ve worked with well over a dozen congregations. More of those were without elders than were with elders. Things went smoothly at some of those congregations with elders and without elders. Some did not go smoothly in either case.

What made the difference in those cases where things did not go smoothly? The people. God’s plan was not at fault; it never will be. People are nevertheless not shy about affirming that aspects of God’s plan “won’t work.” Regarding church discipline and withdrawing fellowship, for example, I have actually heard Christians say, “I just don’t believe it will work.” That is about like saying, “I don’t believe baptism for remission of sins will work.” How dare we say that anything which God has ordained will not work? One person said, “A congregation without elders just can’t get along.” In some cases that is true. But, why? Because people will not let it work. It is not God’s fault when things do not “work.”

Before discussing our subject in greater detail we shall give attention to **God’s Ideal** with regard to congregational leadership in general. Elders as leaders will not be our primary focus, because, as noted, there is presently a great deal of discussion on this subject. We focus, however, on leadership in general, and how that applies in local churches without elders.

Perhaps one other thing I should point out is that leadership is being considered in the area of decision-making which involves the congregation. To some extent, each member of the church should individually be active in leadership, because there are many ways an individual can be a leader. The New Testament has many examples of individuals manifesting leadership. They set about doing the Lord’s will, though not directed by some formal leader to do so.

I. GOD’S IDEAL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP

God knows, and we should know by a study of His word, that good leadership is essential within the church if she is to function effectively in fulfilling His eternal purpose. It is indeed interesting to note the emphasis upon leadership among God’s people, in both the Old and New Testaments.

It was, and is, God’s plan that elders be appointed in congregations when qualified men are available. It is also enlightening to note the responsibility of elders as leaders. They are to “feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Peter says, “Feed the flock of God which is among you...Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (I Pet. 5:1-3). Needless to say, when church members are not fed the right kind of food and properly cared for, they are not going to mature and behave properly. Once again: When such occurs it is not God’s fault, rather that of the people.

That elders are to be capable and effective leaders is made crystal clear by the fact that God has given specific qualifications for elders. These qualifications are primarily set forth in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

In churches with elders, the overwhelming cause of problems stems from the fact that God’s qualifications have been ignored, and replaced with man’s ideas and desires. Among those called “elders” today, it would be at best difficult to find a many who actually meet God’s qualifications. Present conditions reflect that fact.

We now turn our attention to leadership within congregations without elders. The importance of this is seen in the fact that so many congregations are without elders.

II. IS IT RIGHT FOR A CONGREGATION TO EXIST WITHOUT ELDERS?

Some go so far as to question whether a congregation may scripturally exist without elders. It is obvious that congregations existed in New Testament times without elders. Paul left Titus in Crete, “that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee” (Titus 1:5).

Did this mean that elders were to be ordained in every city, whether or not there were men who qualified? Of course not. After telling Titus to ordain elders, Paul immediately starts listing qualifications, as he listed qualifications in I Timothy 3. God’s ideal was, and is, that when men are qualified to serve as elders they should do so, but not when they are not qualified.

A suggestion actually made to me is apparently the view of several brethren: “A congregation should pick out the best men they have and appoint them as elders.” There is evidence that this has been done in more than a few congregations. Does God approve? Surely not. If it is acceptable to waive God’s qualification for elders, may we do the same in other matters? Some have.

III. WHEN CONGREGATIONS LACK ELDERS, IN WHOM IS LEADERSHIP THEN VESTED?

In the absence of a scriptural eldership, leadership of the congregation devolves upon the faithful men of the congregation. God’s order of things as it pertains to spiritual leadership places women in a subordinate role. Thus, by default, women would be excluded from the leadership and/or decision-making of the congregation. That men are over women is clearly established in God’s word, beginning with Genesis 3:16. Then in addition, there is I Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22-24, and I Timothy 2:11-13. When the murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews occurred, the apostles told the brethren to “look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:1-3). This does not mean that women have no right to convey their thoughts to those men making the decisions, rather that they are not the ones to make the decisions, or serve as leaders of the congregation.

Some times some have the idea that a congregation is prohibited in doing various things when there are no elders. But this is not the case. A congregation without elders can make decisions and carry out God’s plans, as congregations with elders can do. In the absence of elders, the faithful men of the congregation must make the decisions.

Walter W. Pigg *from Banner of Truth*

ANNIVERSARY

Cleo and Marion Stone, 02-19; 63rd – Congratulations!

ILL

Sunday: Kathleen Camp, Robin, Lauren and Lindsey Brown (AM), Millie Robertson. **Wednesday:** Millie Robertson. Tom Tucker had outpatient tests for his heart at Shawnee Mission Medical Center on Thursday.

Those battling cancer: Jamal Abyad, Diane Cannon, David Cole, and Ledgia Campbell. Please remember these, as well as: Meredith Greer, Millie Robertson, Allen Scott, and Ralph and Helen Franklin.

HOME BOUND

Bob Adams resides at Room D-4 of the Johnson County Nursing Center in Olathe. Marion Stone is at home. Please remember these in your prayers and visitation.

OUT OF TOWN

Robin Brown was working out of town beginning on Wednesday of last week. Jeremy Keifer was out of town last week. Chris Edwards was out of town on business last weekend and arrived home on Sunday afternoon.

INDIA MISSIONS

Jim O'Connor and John Shafer have returned from India and Singapore. There is an updated report from John Shafer on the bulletin board in the foyer.

ATTENDANCE

Sunday AM, 41; Sunday PM, 40; Wednesday PM, 35.

Points To Ponder

“When we grow old, there can only be one regret: not to have given enough of ourselves.”

“Kind words and good deeds are eternal. You never know where their influence will end.”

“Good friends are like stars. You don’t always see them, but you know they are always there.”

Those To Serve

February 18, 2007

BUILDING AND COMMUNION.....Cole

MORNING WORSHIP

ANNOUNCEMENTS..... George Thomas
SONG LEADER..... Joel Nelson
OPENING PRAYER John Cody Carter
PRESIDE..... John Dodson
ASSIST.....David Parish
ASSIST.....David Adams
CLOSING PRAYER.....Jeremy Keifer

EVENING WORSHIP

OPENING PRAYER Jared Nelson
CLOSING PRAYER..... Jeff Nemechek
LORD’S SUPPER..... John Dodson

WEDNESDAY 21st

SONG LEADER..... Jeff Nemechek
INVITATION Joel Nelson

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Sunday

Bible Study 9:30 AM
Morning Worship 10:30 AM
Evening Worship 6:00 PM

Wednesday

Ladies Bible Study 10:00 AM
Bible Study 7:00 PM

Preacher: Ted J. Thrasher

Phone: (913) 764-2325

E-mail: olathecoc@sbcglobal.net

CHURCH OF CHRIST

515 WEST PARK

P.O. BOX 482

OLATHE, KANSAS 66051

www.kc-cofc.org/olathe.htm

www.oabs.org/olathe.asp