

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

August 21

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“Desiring The Position Of Elder”

I have been worshipping for the past few weeks with a congregation that does not have elders. They are small in number but want to do the right thing spiritually and scripturally. We have been studying 1 Timothy and have come to the third chapter; the subject is the eldership.

The first thing Paul wants Timothy to be aware of is the “desire” one has in order to hold the office of a bishop. There are numerous other subjects to be studied regarding this highest of offices, but the first one is undoubtedly “desire.”

1 Timothy 3:1 reads, “This is a faithful saying” Paul had started the epistle in 1:5 with the phrase, “...from sincere faith;” and from 1:15 an identical clause with 3:1, “This is a faithful saying....” Obviously a “sincere faith” or a statement that is to be considered as “faithful” is imperative to understanding the sincerity and gravity of what is being said. I.E., the acceptance of the office is not to be taken lightly or superficially.

I have known of congregations where a more political policy was introduced then practiced. The church’s member-

ship was divided into interpersonal sects or factions. When it came to appointing bishops or elders, the sales pitch was, “If you get to put in your man, we get to put in ours.” Ultimately the Lord’s body was not being overseen by scripturally qualified or spiritually minded men, but by politicians who simply held an “official” post. This is wrong!

The word “overseer,” and particularly the word “bishop” means to “be presiding.” I.E., “to be in control or in command of.” Certainly, it can be used in a political sense, but in the Bible, it does not mean that. Passages to be considered on the work of “presbyters” are found not only in 1 Timothy 3, but also chapter 5:17-25, Titus 1, and Hebrews 13:7, 14.

What about “desire” for the office? “Desire” carries several meanings, but here it suggests “seeking or reaching out after something.” The inference is that he might even ask for it, not with the idea of “lording it over the flock,” (1 Pet. 5:3) or becoming a “Diotrephes,” (3 Jn. 9), but with eager yet humble ambition. I.E., he has to want it badly enough to actually seek after it.

In some cases, as mentioned above, men have been thrown into the office for political and/or social reasons. Others have sought to rule over the flock for prestigious reasons. The Christian who genuinely “seeks” this office will “desire” it for the reasons mentioned in Hebrews 13:7, “...to watch out for your souls, as those who must give account....” That is a tremendous responsibility and one that no male child of God would take lightly.

✍ Gary Fiscus

Elders

Perhaps there is no greater need today among churches than to qualify and appoint elders to oversee them and their work. No church can reach its full potential until it reaches the point of having qualified men appointed as overseers (Tit. 1:5). When appointed they should be respected for their work's sake (1 Thess. 5:12-13). As Shepherds of the flock of God they have an awesome responsibility (Heb. 13:17).

Having served as an elder in the past, I know first-hand some of the hard decisions that have to be made and the unjust criticism that often comes with the territory. I also know the joy of overseeing a flock who, for the most part, are humbly serving the Lord. My hat's off to those elders who understand their God-given role of watching for souls and use their position accordingly.

However, elders are not gods nor lords. They are men. They make mistakes, some trivial, but others serious. They should not be automatically followed unconditionally. Sometimes, they should even be rightly rebuked for their sins (1 Tim. 5:19-20).

Local churches have been led into error by people BLINDLY following an eldership because people have the idea that to "obey them that have the rule over you" means that they must follow the elders – unconditionally, no matter what. With many congregations, there is the unwritten rule that the elders' decisions are always to be followed and respected – no questions asked. This conveniently takes the burden of studying and thinking for oneself and gives a convenient "out" if questioned about anything that might be going on within the congregation – "it was the elders' decision and I respect the elders."

Also, often individuals and churches make it their practice to honor without question or investigation any action that the elders of another congregation may take against a member. Folks, wake up. Elders are fallible. Sometimes they can (wittingly or unwittingly) be harsh and unjust in some of their actions. It is, to say the least, irresponsible to automatically accept the judgment of any group of fallible men and act upon it without asking for the basis for their judgment.

Any elders, worth the salt in their bread, will welcome any questions you might have about any decisions they make and will be willing to sit down and discuss the reasons for their decisions. Only those that rule as "lords it over God's heritage" (1 Pet. 5:1-4) will tell you that they expect you to accept without question their decisions because they are "the elders."

It is this "no questions asked" mentality that caused many congregations to adopt the unscriptural innovations of the past.

✍ Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Belleville church of Christ

5635 S County Rd 200E - Belleville, IN - (317) 539-5258

www.bellevillechurch.net

Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.

Evangelist

Brad Phillips... (765) 720-2816