

**THE ELDERSHIP**  
**(God's Wisdom in the Eldership)**  
**Lesson 13**

**I. INTRODUCTION.**

A. The Passages Below Show a Complete Picture of God's Wisdom Displayed in the Eldership.

1. Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17-38; 21:17-26; Eph. 4:11-16; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:14; 5:17-25; Tit. 1:5-16; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24; Jas. 5:13-15; 1 Pet. 5:1-4.
2. Not all of these passages will be discussed in this lesson. The following passages will be discussed in other lessons: the elders' qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9); the elders' relationships within the local church (1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:17-25; Heb.13:7, 17, 24; Jas. 5:13-15; 1 Pet. 5:1-4); and, the elder's selection and ordination (Ac. 14:23; Tit. 1:5).

B. What Can We Learn from God's Wisdom Displayed in the Eldership?

**II. GOD'S WISDOM IN THE ELDERSHIP.**

A. God Wants Wise Decisions (Acts 11:30: 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23: 16:4: 21:17-26).

1. We first read about the Jerusalem elders (along with other elders in Judea) in Acts 11:30 where they are receiving the money for the needy saints among them. We see God's wisdom here displayed in two ways: first, the elders would have the wisdom necessary to make the important decisions concerning the money (who gets what, when, how, etc.); and, second, the elders were involved in the practical, physical care of the brethren. They would have the compassionate hearts necessary to fulfill this task.
2. The next time we read about the Jerusalem elders is in Acts 15. Here, they are hearing about the unlawful work of the Judaizing teachers (v. 2, 4, 6) and then passing judgment on doctrinal issues (v. 22-23; 16:4). Again, we see God's wisdom here displayed in two ways: first, the elders would be able to stop the problem where it got started (v. 24); and, second, the elders, because they were men of the Word (Tit. 1:9), could hear and judge doctrinal matters and stop the spread of false teaching through their wise decisions (v. 28; 21:25; "ordained" in 16:4 comes from the Greek *krino*, meaning "decide" or "judge").
3. The last time we read about the Jerusalem elders is in Acts 21. God's wisdom in their decision-making ability is seen again (v. 23a). These elders are "caught in the middle" between Paul's practices on one side and the Jewish Christians' beliefs on the other side. However, they are able, through a wise decision, to encourage Paul and others to practice an OT law that would not conflict with the law of Christ and help mend any division that may exist in the local church.

B. God Wants the Flock Protected (Acts 20:17-38).

1. The Ephesian elders were to guard themselves. God's wisdom in this instruction is seen in that elders are also vulnerable to dangerous attacks.
2. God knows that sheep sometimes stray and are weak, immature, unstable, and defenseless, so he instructed the elders to protect all of the flock. This flock is of great value because it is "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Elders must never forget the great value of the flock they are shepherding. God knows that "grievous wolves" (false teachers) will come. They are everywhere (within and without the local church) and their power is great. In their subtlety, they bring perversion, confusion, destruction, and spiritual death.
3. God also knows how easy it is for a person to become less alert, weary, unconcerned, and selfish, so he charges the elders to be alert and wide awake for these wolves. They must put forth the necessary time, thought, energy, and work necessary to be alert, coupled with prayer and Bible study.
4. Elders, being human, also need building up as they experience troubles and problems. God knows this so he wants elders to look to him and to his word for help in everything. Paul was leaving these elders, but God and his word would remain with them. Dependence upon God and His word is vitally important for elders. Only strong elders can properly defend the flock from wolves. A weak eldership will lead to a weak local church.
5. Elders face a special temptation to be greedy, especially if they are supported financially by the local church (1 Tim. 3:3; 5:17-18). God demands that elders work hard to supply the physical needs of themselves and the weak (Eph. 4:28) and do more giving than receiving. This would be a good antidote against covetousness.

C. God Wants the Saints Taught and Trained (Eph. 4:11-16).

1. Those Christians with less knowledge, experience, and training can be equipped by elders to serve better with help from those who are more knowledgeable, experienced, and trained. God's wisdom provided for a plan to train saints in a local church. He sent Christ to give "gifts" (men who could train others) to the local. Elders (along with the evangelist) would do this training.
2. Why do members need training? God knows that the membership in a local church can be destroyed through false teaching and laziness. Elders are the men who train the members to be sound in the truth (vv. 13-15) and to be busy working together (v. 16).

D. God Wants Shared Leadership (Phil. 1:1).

1. God's wisdom calls for a plurality of elders in each local church. The practice of placing one man over a church or group of churches, which evolved from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, is contrary to God's wisdom. (Review Lesson 2.) God's plan for a plurality of elders would keep men from stepping out of place in their

relationship with other Christians - a kind of "checks and balances" plan. For example, one elder would not be able to exalt himself to a place of "preeminence" over others (a place reserved for Jesus; Col. 1:18). Elders would not be tempted to fall into the sins of pride, self-elevation, superiority, covetousness, selfish ambition, or dictatorial action. Elders would be able to continue the practice of mutuality, interdependence, brotherly love, humility, and servanthood.

2. We also learn another truth from God's wisdom here. God wants the eldership to be a "team effort". The eldership can share the burden of leading all the flock (Eccl. 4:9-12), they can balance out their strengths and weaknesses (Prov. 11:14; greater temperament, moderation, correction and accountability), and they can provide more opportunities for more capable, dedicated, and spiritually minded men to serve.

E. God Wants Hard-Working Leaders (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

1. God's wisdom calls for hard-working men in the local church. The word "labor" (Gr. *kopiaō*) in verse 12 means "toil resulting in weariness" and "laborious toil". The elders in Thessalonica were engaged in strenuous work. This was not labor for personal employment, but labor "among you" - "church work". A part of their labor included "leading" and "admonishing" (instructing) church members. Elders are not "church board members" who simply get together for a few minutes once a month and talk about church matters. The eldership is supposed to be a hard-working pastoral body.
2. Many men, however, are spiritually lazy, and churches with spiritually lazy men do not grow, nor do these churches ever appoint godly elders. "But how can you expect a man to have a job, raise a family, and then find time to do hard church work?", you say. Many men with jobs and families seem to find time to do many things (remodel homes, yard work, sports, etc.), why not hard church work? God's wisdom calls for elders to have self-sacrifice, self-discipline, perseverance, and hard work for the local church.

F. God Wants Recognition for Special Tasks (1 Tim. 4:14).

1. "Ordination" in the denominational world of churches is very popular. It is an official ceremonial rite conferred on men and women giving them special privileges (priestly function, exclusive ministerial rites, etc.). The Bible nowhere speaks of an "ordination" ceremony.
2. However, God does want men to be set apart and recognized for their special tasks. This was done in OT and NT times by "the laying on of the hands" (Num. 8:10, 14; 27:15-23; Deut. 34:9; Acts 6:6; 13:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:22). Whatever the special task is, "the laying on of the hands" creates a deeper sense of solemn responsibility, accountability, fellowship, and blessing between the parties involved. For this reason, it was not to be done hastily or thoughtlessly (1 Tim. 5:22). God's wants his

people to make a special moment for his special tasks. God's work in the local church is nothing ordinary!

**III. CONCLUSION.** The Eldership is a Display of God's Wisdom. We Should Not Study It Just to Learn Some Facts. We Should Study It to Learn How God's Wisdom Can Be A Blessing to the Local Church.

### Lesson Thirteen Discussion

1. How is a local church helped by elders who are able to make wise decisions?
2. What must members do with the elders' wise decisions?
3. What bad things can happen to the flock and what is God's remedy?
4. What bad things can happen to shepherds and what is God's remedy?
5. What must elders do with a part of their personal finances according to Acts 20:33-35?
6. Who or what did God give the local church to train them for service?
7. Why is membership training important according to Ephesians 4:12-16?
8. Shared leadership can prevent what among the eldership and shared leadership can promote what among the eldership?
9. How can elders be hard working men engaged in church work and at the same time be employed in other work and have time for their family?
10. Does the Bible speak of an "ordination" ceremony in the denominational sense of the word? What does God want done with men entering into special tasks?
11. How should we study the eldership?