

A LOCAL CHURCH WITHOUT ELDERS

Lesson 8

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Sheep Without Shepherds In A Local Church Is Not A Good Arrangement (Mt. 9:36).
- B. There Is An Urgent Need for Elders in the Local Church. We Have an Elder Shortage and A Leadership Crisis in the Lord's Church Today.

II. NO ELDERS IN A LOCAL CHURCH -- SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS.

- A. Is This Local Church Organized?
 - 1. Different organizational relationships may exist in a local church.
 - a) Unscripturally organized — a local church which is organized contrary the NT pattern of local church organization (see Lessons 1, 2, and 3), or a local church which appoints unqualified men to serve as elders.
 - b) Unscripturally unorganized — a local church which has qualified men to serve as elders whom they refuse or neglect to appoint as elders.
 - c) Scripturally organized — a local church with qualified men appointed and serving as elders (Phil. 1:1).
 - d) Scripturally unorganized — a local church which desires to have elders, but cannot appoint them because they have no qualified men to fill this role at the present time (Acts 14:21-23; Tit. 1:5).
 - 2. How long may a local church remain scripturally unorganized? The NT does not give an exact time, but it does give examples involving a few months or a few years (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:21f; 20:17; compare Phil. 1:1 with Acts 16).
 - 3. Be careful with the time frame and the appointment of elders. Pressure to ordain elders too quickly can turn a scripturally unorganized local church into an unscripturally organized local church! On the other hand, delaying to appoint qualified men can turn a scripturally unorganized local church into an unscripturally unorganized local church!
- B. Is This Local Church Lacking?
 - 1. A local church without elders should not be content with its present condition.
 - 2. First, a local church without elders needs to be "set in order" (Tit. 1:5). The Greek word *epidiorthoo* translated "order" means "to set straight again". Second, a local church without elders is "lacking" or "wanting" (Tit. 1:5). The Greek word *leipo* used here means "to be left behind; to lack; destitute" (see Lk. 18:22; Jas. 1:4-5; 2:15; Tit. 1:5; 3:13 for its uses).

C. Why Does A Local Church Not Have Elders?

1. There are men who are not elders, but they are qualified and they want to be appointed as elders as soon as possible. Many men are also working now to be elders one day. This is the ideal situation!
2. There are men who are not interested in becoming qualified to be elders. Many men are not interested in the hard work, planning, self-discipline, and time it takes to become qualified to be an elder. With the exception of a few elder qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, every mature Christian should meet these qualifications!
3. There are men who are not interested in sacrificing or serving as an elder. Many men meet the qualifications, but do not want to sacrifice their time and energy to serve a local church in the role of an elder. They do not "seek" and "desire" this role (1 Tim. 3:1). They do not want to be "God's steward" (Tit. 1:7).
4. There are men who made mistakes early in life which now disqualifies them from being an elder. Many men are converted too late in life to have the right family, the right marriage, or the right personal characteristics necessary to be an elder.
5. There are men who do not want elders. Many men do not want to give up what control they have in a business meeting (or elsewhere) and so they block the appointment of elders. They do not want to lose their control over the local church. Actually, these men want to be in the role of an "unofficial" elder without appointing elders.
6. There are men who cannot come to an agreement on the qualifications of elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Many church members have nit-picked the qualifications to death so much so that no one (in their mind) can be qualified to be an elder.
7. There are men who believe that democratic rule is better than an eldership. Many men do not accept the wisdom of God pertaining to local church organization.

D. How May A Local Church Make Decisions?

1. An unauthorized solution - congregational meetings (all members including women).
 - a) This method of decision-making was advanced by Vance E. Trefethen in his book, *Confusion or Consensus* (New Horizon Books, 1993).
 - b) Vance E. Trefethen's position has been answered in written debate by Tom Roberts in *Guardian of Truth* (Aug. 18 and Nov. 17, 1994).
2. An expedient solution - men's business meetings.
 - a) The men's business meeting is an "expedient". This "expedient" is authorized generically by all the NT passages that (1) speak of the work of the local church; and, (2) speak of male members in the position of authority. Women, of course, can and should give their input to the men who in turn can take it to the men's business meeting for consideration.

- b) The men's business meeting should operate under the following general guidelines:
 - (1) When there is a difference of business, it is the Lord's "business" that is important, not man's "business".
 - (2) When there is a difference of opinion, there should be consensus, not "majority vote".
 - (3) When there is a difference of experience or knowledge, there should be deference given to older wisdom, not youthful inexperience.
 - c) The business meeting is an expedient and should be considered temporary. It is not to be a permanent substitute for elders.
3. An authorized solution - elders making decisions as they take input from the members (the preacher, the deacons, the teachers, all the members, both men and women, etc.). Elders delegating work to various members.

III. CONCLUSION.

- A. Not All Local Churches Without Elders are Sinful And Not All Local Churches Without Elders Are Sinless. Each Local Church Must Honestly Evaluate Themselves.
- B. The Longer A Local Church Remains Without Elders The Greater the Danger For Disorganization. Local Churches Without Elders Should Not Be the Ideal or Norm.
- C. What Can Be Done About A Lack of Elders and Leadership in a Local Church? Teach, Train, and Talk About the Eldership Constantly and Earnestly.

Lesson Eight Discussion

1. What is the current condition of local churches with regard to elders? Do we have many churches with elderships or few?
2. What four organizational conditions may exist in a local church and which one best describes your congregation?
3. According to Titus 1:5, what is the condition of a local church without elders?
4. What are some reasons why local churches do not have elders? Are any of them good reasons?
5. How may a local church make congregational decisions in an authorized way in the absence of elders?
6. What can a local church do to appoint elders?