

Introduction

In any place of responsibility there are several sorts of dangers one must be prepared for. There are those who are critical of everything elders do. Like an opposition party in parliament, no matter how good an idea is they will criticize it because that is what they do best. The local church is made up of various individuals of various temperaments and attitudes, no different from the secular world.

Dangers Elders Have To Face

1) The critical attitude of elders

- a) There are two sorts of disgruntled individuals:
 - i) Those who are nice to the individual's face but speak ill of him behind his back.
 - ii) Those who are quite vocal in their displeasure and are not hesitant about gathering sympathizers around them.An elder has to be very difficult to upset, and yet be as sensitive as a lamb. Complaints are part of the territory.
- b) The easiest thing in the world is to criticize, and often this stems from jealousy because one cannot make the decisions. Of course this would be denied.
 - i) Pilate recognized the reason they wanted the Lord put to death was because of envy (Matt. 27:18), but they would never have admitted that.
 - ii) It can also be an indication of an individual seeking to boast themselves to gain the populous as Absalom did. Despite the fact that David his father was still alive, and had declared that Solomon would sit on the throne of Israel, that did not stop Absalom covertly criticizing the way things were done. He sat at the gate and said: "Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (2 Sam. 15:4-6).
 - iii) If, in your perception, it seems to you that the elders are not up to the biblical publications, shortcomings innumerable, then, in the greatest humility before God and by his help, seek to set yourself the times praying for them to do this with reverence, godly fear.

2) The danger of presumptuousness

- a) This is seen in the unspoken recognition that Mr. So in So is the recognized elder who has the final say in decision making. It results in having a number of "yes" men which is tragic because even the throne in Heaven, while surrounded by throne sitters, were not "yes" men. They were overcomers who had stood for the truth. When the decisions are "passed by" Mr. So in So for his approval, then there is something dreadfully wrong. Ideally, all the elders are equal, but to the detriment of individuals and churches, often there is one man who is "the main Elder".
- b) When asked to help in the caring for the saints, another aspect of pre-leadership which an individual must consider is, "What is my response to the request". Is there a hesitancy due to the solemnity of sharing in such a responsible work, or is there an immediate "yes" response? It is always a very serious thing to take on a responsibility of such magnitude in the service of God.
 - i) When God called Moses he was very aware of his inability and made excuses not to go (Ex. 3:10-4:14)
 - ii) When Solomon was made king, he said to God: "I am but a little child" (1 Kgs. 3:7)
 - iii) Gideon's response to the call of God was: "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Jud. 6:15).
 - iv) To my recollection, the only one who ever without reluctance, was Abimelech. In the parable the olive tree rejected kingship as did the vine, but not the bramble (Jud. 9:8-16).

- v) Whenever an individual is approached to assist the elders in the caring for the flock and there is no hesitance, it is a sign of self sufficiency. We all have pride in us and that is something an elder must not have or present in frowardness.
- c) Another situation arises when evangelists and Bible teachers fail to keep their proper place. When this happens they must be corrected for they are stepping beyond their boundaries. When an evangelist or Bible teacher come to minister to the saints or present the gospel, they are under the government of that church. They can be asked for their opinion, but they must never give it unsolicited, and if it is asked for it does not have to be accepted. Having associated with local churches for forty-seven years, I have seen this happen a number of times.
- d) A very grave danger is becoming blinded by our own pseudo spirituality. When asked basic questions on the manifested presence of God in the churches, some of the replies I am given are: "We have 100 in the fellowship including children"; "Our building is 60,000 square feet"; "X number of people come for our family service". The questions are:
 - i) How many people have got saved over the last year in the gatherings?
 - ii) How many new members have come into the fellowship?
 - iii) How many baptisms have there been?
 - iv) How many participate in the Bible reading?
 - v) How many come to the prayer meeting?
 - vi) How many are growing in Christlikeness?

These are the evidences of spiritual blessing. Sadly, many churches fail to see that when speaking to the church of Laodicea they were functioning, totally ignorant of the need of anything, but the Lord was outside (Rev. 3:20). The only church the Lord threatened to remove was those who were all truth and no love (Rev. 2:4). There is a very real danger of pseudo spirituality. The Pharisees and Sadducees were all very formal in their spirituality, but the truth of the Lord was rejected.

The Fundamental Questions

Before there can be a practice of Biblical eldership, there must be the acceptance that the scriptures are the sole authority. Man's definitions, designs, or rituals must be decided as to whether there is an explicit scripture to support that which is being done, or is that which is being done contradicting the Scriptures? To clarify the last statement, there is no scripture for a Sunday School, a confederation of local churches for hosting a conference. However, few would say it is contrary to the truths of the scriptures. Therefore, when considering elders, what is the practice of having elders based on, the scriptures or man's ideology? We cannot have both. The scriptures alone must be our director. This is important for on this matter lies the selecting; the ordination of elders; the qualifications; and the responsibilities of elders. Tradition, one man's thoughts, etc., are not always according to the Scriptures. Never can one man determine to have another brought onto the eldership without honest prayerful seeking the mind of God, and it will invariably be in fellowship with the other elders and fully accepted by the saints. No man nor group of men have the right to ignore all others and make self determinations.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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