

God-Ordained Congregations

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Acts 20:28 (NAS)

It is very interesting to me that God has brought me to this point of addressing God-ordained congregations at a time when pastoral authority is coming under heavy scrutiny and being found flawed to the core. Regardless of the focus of the scrutiny, Catholic priests or Protestant pastors, what is found is unfaithfulness to that which is and has been taught as the law of God. To say that The Church is in a leadership crisis would be an understatement. The sad truth is that we have been living in this crisis for decades and find it acceptable. The question is, are we willing to repent and turn back to God-ordained leadership for The Church or will we do what is right in our own eyes?

When I first began writing on God-ordained relationships I did so because of my concern for The Church. God revealed to me then that to properly address the crisis in The Church I needed to address the crisis of personal obedience, individually and within the framework of holy matrimony and family. Thus was born the God-Ordained series over the last two years. (You can read the articles in full for yourself on our web-site, GrowLeaders.org, under archives.)

Where To Begin

Having God-ordained congregations begins with an understanding of God’s structure for congregational leadership. In the same way that God has established roles and responsibilities in the home, He has established roles and responsibilities in The Church. These roles and responsibilities work hand in hand with each other. There is no contradiction of authority between the family and The Church. As such, it should be no surprise that God has given men the role and responsibility of leadership in The Church in the same way they are given the authority in the home. It is also important to note that authority and responsibility in The Church, as in the home, means Service to The Church rather than rule of The Church.

The selecting of leaders in the church is not the American prized democracy, it is an autocracy. God, through the Holy Spirit chooses men to watch over the church ([Acts 20:28](#), [1 Corinthians 12:11; 28-31](#)). These men are called overseers, elders and bishops. God appoints them to shepherd the members of the congregation including to guard them from the enemy. Theirs is a spiritual role and a spiritual responsibility. It is one to which God calls them through the Holy Spirit. The office of elder, therefore, is not given to the most popular person. It is not chosen by the participant or given by the congregation. It is an act of the will of God. By very virtue of the fact that God chooses the man, it is a holy office.

How does God Choose?

When we talk about the Holy Spirit making men elders it sounds kind of like the “Twilight Zone.” How does God, whom we cannot physically see or audibly hear, appoint men to serve us? From where would our confidence come that the right men are in authority? What if . . . ? There are a lot of those:

1. The wrong men got in power?
2. The right men got in and began to abuse their authority?
3. We couldn’t tell who should be in charge?

Although the making and choosing of elders is spiritual and has aspects which will always be a mystery to us, God has given us sufficient characteristics of an elder to help us see those He is calling

to this office. Each of these characteristics are things we can easily recognize:

He is to be:

above reproach,
the husband of one wife,
temperate,
prudent,
respectable,
hospitable,
able to teach ([1 Timothy 3:2](#))
gentle,
uncontentious,
free from the love of money ([1 Tim. 3:3](#))
one who manages his household well keeping his children under control with all dignity
([1 Timothy 3:4](#))
have a good reputation with those outside the church ([1 Timothy 3:7](#))
above reproach as God's steward ([Titus 1:7](#))
loving what is good,
sensible,
just,
devout,
self-controlled ([Titus 1:8](#))
holding fast the faithful word,
able both to exhort in sound doctrine/to refute those who contradict ([Titus 1:9](#))

He is NOT to be:

addicted to wine,
pugnacious ([1 Timothy 3:3](#))
a new convert ([1 Timothy 3:6](#))
accused of dissipation or rebellion,
self-willed,
quick-tempered,
addicted to wine,
fond of sordid gain ([Titus 1:7](#))

Although some of these descriptions may require some further discussion for understanding, there are enough characteristics listed for us to be able to say with a certainty that one does, or does not, qualify as an elder based on God's description.

[Seeing Through His Eyes](#)

Based on scripture, how do you fit God's characteristics for an elder? Whoa!, you say, no one is perfect! This is true. However, you do understand what it means to be above reproach, temperate, respectable, hospitable, gentle. Even without spiritual discernment, most people can look at the life of a person and see if they love what is good. Look to the life of Jesus. He is our example in each of these things. He is the Head of The Church and the perfect elder.

Who am I to judge someone else when I don't measure up? That is the blessing of God-ordained leaders. They are called by God, not by man. If asked, however, we have the scriptures by

which to apply these characteristics next to the man in question. If there is any doubt about a man's qualifications we need to search further, we need to talk to the one being considered and we need to hear from God.

Obedient Application

The difficulty in recognizing those who qualify as elders, once again, is not that God is vague about who He calls as an elder. The difficulty is that we are not obedient in applying His standards. How does your congregation, assuming they purport to follow biblical guidelines, measure whether or not a man is above reproach? How do they define manages his own household well, or keeping his children under control with all dignity? How is the reputation of a leader being measured outside the church? Then again, if a man fails to qualify in any of these areas, what is the process for removing him from service?

Current Application

For the most part, congregations give lip service to biblical guidelines but do not intentionally apply them to those in leadership or those recommended for leadership. Pastors caught in adultery are too often allowed to merely change congregations. Many congregations have a Don't ask, Don't tell policy when it comes to moral failure of a pastor or other spiritual leader. When caught in sin, of any kind, they change congregations, or remove themselves from a leadership position until things blow over. No one asks why. In the unusual times when the right questions are asked previous congregations often don't tell. The reason often given? We don't want to ruin his ministry.

God's standards don't cover just moral failure. He is specific about the way in which the elder treats his family, handles money, how he deals with his anger, and how he responds to his community.

One of the major problems with God's standards for His leaders is that they reach to the very core of the individual. For members of a congregation, or congregational leadership, to know a man well enough to see if he is qualified would require spending time with him, his family and his business associates. Will we get that intimate? Will we spend that kind of time to be in a position to see if one is qualified to lead The Church of God?

God-Defined Responsibility

God not only calls the man to be an elder, He clearly defines how he is to lead. Jesus made the distinction between a temporal leader and a spiritual leader clear in **Matthew 20:25-28. You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.** NAS

Temporal leaders rule over people and please themselves. A spiritual leader, however, is a servant and a slave in the likes of Christ who gave His life for those not deserving His grace. The word servant is better translated minister. But slave means, well . . . slave. Like Jesus, an elder gives his life for the spiritual well being of the members of the congregation, not because they want to, not because it is personally expedient, but ONLY because God has called him and he has responded in obedience.

With this servants demeanor, the elder is to admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted and help the weak (**1Thessalonians 5:14**). So, as events unfold, the elder must discern if those involved in

the congregation are unruly, fainthearted or weak before they know what action God would have them take.

Elders are to watch over the souls of those whom God gives them, giving an account for them on judgement day. (**Hebrews 13:17**)

Clearly the elder's role and responsibility is not one man can accomplish. Only by God's divine wisdom and discernment can a man fulfill the office of elder.

Next Issue: **God-Ordained Followers**

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