

TRUTH FOR THE WORLD
Bible Question and Answer Booklet

ELDERS

QUESTION: I have been informed and have proof that an elder is guilty of child molestation, but he continues to deny it. Should this man continue to serve as an elder?

ANSWER: Clearly, a man proven guilty of child molestation should not hold the office of elder! He is not qualified to do so (I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). You suggest that you were "informed" of the elder's guilt. Let me caution you concerning Paul's words to Timothy (I Timothy 5:19), "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but under two or three witnesses." This means that one is not to accept as valid an accusation against an elder, unless there are two or three witnesses to support the charge! Such would be sin and require repentance of those involved in the communication, i.e., the transmitter and the receiver! You state in your letter that you are unfaithful to the Lord. Before you can scripturally deal with the elder's situation, you must first deal with your own unfaithfulness by returning to your first love (Matthew 7:3-5; Acts 8:22). If the demands of the above passages have been satisfied and you have proof positive that the man is guilty as charged, as a faithful Christian it would be your responsibility to go to him alone with the evidence in order to gain his soul. If he will not hear you, then take two or three witnesses (to gain his soul). If he neglects to hear them, tell it to the church (to gain his soul). If he neglects to hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen man and a publican (Matthew 18:15-17) "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (I Corinthians 5:4-5). If you were "informed" of this elder's guilt by another "Christian," he or she as well should be called upon to repent, if he or she did not first go to the erring brother. Many often carry gossip to others (sometimes for self-seeking and ulterior purposes) under the guise of seeking advice, which, of course, is sinful and soul damning!

Note: (Too many times use of the biblical principle of Matthew 18:15-17 is avoided by those who demand its application solely to situations in which one has been personally affronted. Though this is the immediate context in which the passage is found, it is undeniable that this Christ-given principle is obviously the most effective way of dealing with sins that are not public in nature, whether personal or non-personal. This biblical approach will always bring less permanent damage to the accused; about whose soul we are to be concerned and whom we are trying to reclaim. As well, it will, without doubt, result in less damage to the local congregation and to the body of Christ in general. It does absolutely no good to the accused, the congregation, or the cause of Christ to unnecessarily showcase sin! Certainly and clearly, however, additional principles and patterns are set forth, and to be used, when dealing with the public teaching of false doctrines, e.g., Romans 16:17-18; II Timothy 1:15; II Timothy 2:16-18; Titus 1:10-16).

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QUESTION: May women scripturally serve as deacons and elders?

ANSWER: The qualifications for these offices are found in I Timothy 3:1-3 and in Titus 1:6-9. That these unchangeable qualifications relate only to men can clearly be seen in these passages by the use of only masculine nouns and pronouns. Additionally, both elders and deacons are to be the husbands of one wife (I Timothy 3, verses 2 and 12). Women, therefore, cannot fulfill this God-given qualification!

Also, women cannot scripturally become elders and deacons (deaconesses) because such would result in a violation of I Timothy 2:9-15. This scripture forbids women to usurp the authority that God has given to man. Verses nine and ten read, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

QUESTION: If a man has been chosen to be an elder, because of his money - doesn't visit the sick, his children don't fear the Lord, he is not careful with his tongue, his wife attends the denominations, can he be dropped? If yes, how? If no, why not?

ANSWER: Clearly, a man guilty of these things is not qualified to be an elder. It is also evident that such a person, unless, he repents will be lost in eternity. If you have proof positive that the man is guilty as charged, as a faithful Christian, it would be your responsibility to go to him alone with the evidence in order to gain his soul. If he will not hear you, then take two or three witnesses (to gain his soul). If he neglects to hear them, tell it to the church (to gain his soul). According to I Timothy 5:19-20, the man should be rebuked publicly, that others also may fear! If he neglects to hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen man and a publican (Matthew 18:15-17) "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (I Corinthians 5:4-5). In other words, the fellowship of the church is to be withdrawn from him (II Thessalonians 3:6-15) until such time as he is brought to repentance.

If the man is willing to repent, he should be restored to full fellowship in the congregation. However, he should not under any circumstances be in the office of an elder, since it is clear, according to the question, that he lacks many of the qualifications (I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9), especially that of ruling his own house well. Certainly he is not qualified to take care of the church of God (I Timothy 4-5).

QUESTION: In light of a statement in your correspondence course that "Nowhere do you read of a pastor (preacher) being head over a congregation," would you explain Ephesians 4:11?

ANSWER: The thrust of the paragraph in which this statement was made was to show that the denominational world has departed from the scriptural pattern for the organization of the church. The denominations have rejected the divine pattern by assigning the title of "pastor" to the preacher, or the evangelist, thus

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giving him the rule over the local congregation. First the word "pastor" is never scripturally applied to the preacher or evangelist. The words preacher and evangelist refer to the same function in the church. In other words, the evangelist is the preacher! Note that Paul told Timothy, in II Timothy 4:2, to "preach the word," and then in II Timothy 4:5, he told him to "do the work of an evangelist." Therefore, they are the same!

The word "pastor" is another word used to describe the work of an elder. It is from the Greek word *poimen*, which means to "tend" or "feed, or to "take care of." In Acts 20:28, as Paul is talking to the Ephesian elders or overseers, he instructs these to "feed" the church of God. The word "feed" in this passage is also from the Greek word *poimen* (pastor). What Paul then is saying to these elders is, 'you elders are to "pastor" (feed) the church.' So then, we can see that the elders are the pastors, not the preacher (evangelist). This is, as well, made clear in the passage questioned. Notice that Paul shows a clear difference between evangelists (preachers) and "pastors." Why does he make this distinction? Simply because the word "pastor" in Ephesians 4:11 refers to elders, not to preachers (evangelists)!

The statement in the correspondence course is true. "Nowhere do you read of a preacher (erroneously called a "pastor" by the denominations) being head over a congregation." The "rule" of a congregation belongs only to a plurality of elders within the local congregation (Hebrews 13:7,17; I Peter 5:1-4). The "rule" of a congregation was not assigned to the preacher. He, as all others in the local congregation, is to be under the "rule" of the elders, and is to be obedient to them within the guidelines of God's Word!

QUESTION: Do we have spiritual leaders in the church today?

ANSWER: There is no earthly head of the church! Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Acts 2:29-35) and has been made "to be the head of all things to the church" (Ephesians 1:22). Each congregation of the Lord's church is self-governing, answerable only to Christ!

Each congregation is overseen by a plurality (more than one) of elders, independent of all other congregations. It is the responsibility of these men to "feed the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). By this we understand that there is no higher governing body on this earth and to this we are limited! Deacons are to serve the congregation under the oversight of the elders. Evangelists are to proclaim the Word (II Timothy 4:1-5). A religious group without this prescribed organization cannot be the church of the Bible!

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QUESTION: If an elder's wife dies must he step down? Does he have the right to step down?

ANSWER: No! If an elder served well during the life of his wife, he retains the qualifying family background necessary to serve after her death. Those who hold that he must step down would have to take the position that if his believing children died, he, in this case, would also have to step down. Yet, not many will go this far! If an elder has the proven ability of having had his children in subjection, even though they die, as in the case of the wife passing away, he retains the same ability.

If an elder "wants" to step down for any reason, it is his right to do so! If he no longer has the desire to serve in that office, he has disqualified himself and must step down (I Timothy 3:1).

QUESTION: How can one become an elder if his wife belongs to a denomination? If a man can't control his own house, how can he take care of the Lord's church?

ANSWER: Such a man is not qualified to be an elder! Certainly, he does not have the rule of his own house and his ability to teach appears also to be, at best, questionable. Neither would he be of "good report of them which are without." For such a one to seek or accept the position of elder is a violation of God's Word (I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9), and is therefore sinful. This man needs to be approached as a brother in keeping with Paul's admonition of I Timothy 5:19-20, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may also fear."

QUESTION: What is the work of deacons in the church?

ANSWER: The English word deacon comes from a Greek word that means "servant." Deacons do not rule, nor have authority! They are to serve the congregation under the oversight of the elders.

QUESTION: What do we call the person who chairs the church meetings?

ANSWER: I assume from the question that there are no elders where you worship. If there are, these men, of course, would have the authority to chair meetings. If there are no elders then one of the brethren should be appointed to chair the meeting. Having no authority, it would be his purpose to assure orderly transaction of the business at hand. Under no circumstances, should a woman chair such a meeting, unless it is in a congregation made up solely of women (I Timothy 2:11-12). To refer to a man chairing a meeting as the "chairman," because it describes the function he is doing would not be wrong. However, allow me to suggest that you avoid using any title or expression that might elevate one brother over another. Nothing good can come from it, but will often create jealousies and division within a congregation. Even the words preacher, teacher, deacon, and elder are not to be used as titles. These are to be used simply to

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describe the function being done by individuals or groups. We all have names! Let us use these!

QUESTION: Can we appoint someone as a deacon who drinks?

ANSWER: No! One who drinks cannot be a faithful Christian and only faithful Christian men can become deacons (I Timothy 8-13)! Please read Proverbs 23:29-35; Isaiah 5:11; Habakkuk 4:2; I Corinthians 6:9-11; and Galatians 5:19-21. In addition to the clear teaching of these passages, also consider the fact that the partaking of alcoholic beverages (in any amount) lowers one's resistance to temptation and, further, that those who do so, very often yield to all sorts of ungodly sins. How can one who drinks alcohol pray (as all have been commanded to do) that they will not be led into temptation (Matthew 6:13)? To do so would be to make a mockery of God and His word! The apostle Paul in I Corinthians 6:19 states that, as Christians, we are not our own; that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, belonging to Him! It follows then that to introduce any substance of harm (such as drugs, alcohol or tobacco) into that which houses the Holy Spirit would be inappropriate. As well, such activity in one's body certainly does not glorify God and would, therefore, be a violation of I Corinthians 6:20.

Some have foolishly opted to exempt deacons from the foregoing on the basis of I Timothy 3:8, which states that they are not to be "given to much wine." This passage is not authorizing the deacons (or any other) to take wine in small amounts. It simply says that in order for one to be qualified as a deacon he cannot to be given to drunkenness!

QUESTION: By what authority do churches of Christ have committees composed of elders and deacons?

ANSWER: By the authority of the New Testament (I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; Philippians 1:1; Hebrews 13:7,17; I Peter 5:1-3)!

QUESTION: Is it scriptural for an elder or deacon to be appointed by his fellow elders and deacons without input from the congregation?

ANSWER: No! Some men in the sixth chapter of Acts were to be selected to perform a particular function within the church. These were not to be elders, but, nonetheless, this scriptural selection process was at the direction of inspired men. These told the disciples in Jerusalem to "select ye out among you" the men to serve. Man can devise no better way! The congregation, under the oversight of the elders, then should make the selection with extremely careful consideration to the qualifications of elders and deacons as detailed in I Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9. Certainly, however, this should not be construed to mean that the present elders who "watch for your souls" (Hebrews 13:7) do not have the right (collectively) to reject from the eldership those against whom valid charges are brought, whether as to qualifications or conduct of life!

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QUESTION: If one does not meet the qualifications to be an elder is he allowed to do or carry out the duty of an elder if there are no other elders in the church?

ANSWER: A man who is not qualified to be an elder should not conduct himself as an elder. Neither should the congregation accept him as an elder. Even if the man was qualified to be an elder, he could not scripturally function as such, unless there were others also qualified and appointed. The Bible demands that there be a plurality (more than one) of elders in each congregation (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). This does not mean that one who is not qualified to be an elder, but yet is a faithful Christian, cannot lead in worship and participate in collective decision-making relative to congregational matters on an equal basis with the other faithful men in a congregation until such time as qualified men can properly be selected to serve.

QUESTION: Are the following positions scripturally correct?

1. If a man has but one faithful child he cannot scripturally serve as an elder.
2. If one of a man's children have becomes unfaithful after leaving home, the father cannot be appointed as an elder.
3. If a man is appointed as an elder, after which one of his believing, faithful children leaves home and apostatizes, the man becomes disqualified at that point.
4. That Proverbs 22:6 says that if we teach our children well, they will always remain faithful.

ANSWER: In I Timothy 3:1 the record says that in order for one to be an elder he must be "One who ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." Titus 1:6 says, "having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly." Although in both instances the plural (children) is used, there is no logical or scriptural basis to conclude that the Holy Spirit is teaching that a man with but one faithful child falls short of this qualification. As we look to God's Word, we often find that the singular and plural of "children" are used interchangeably. For example: In Genesis 21:7, Sarah said, "Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given "children" (plural) suck for I have given him a son (singular) in his old age. Though having but one son, Sara indicated that she had given suck to children (plural). In Luke 14:26, Jesus said we cannot be His disciple if we don't love Him more than our children (plural). Shall we understand this to mean that one cannot be qualified to be His disciple if he has only one child (singular) to love less than Him? Of course not! Consider I Timothy 5: 9-10: Here a widow could be taken into the number "if she brought up children." Does Paul imply here that an otherwise qualified widow who had brought up only "one" child could not be taken into the number? Certainly not! How about the slave to be set free at the fifty year Jubilee (Leviticus 25:41). He was instructed to take his "children" with him. But what if he only had one child to take? Could he still be freed? Of course! The same principle is true in Timothy and Titus. And the same principle is true today. For example: If I were to stand before an audience and

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you, having but one child, were a part of that audience and I would announce to all, "all fathers who have children come forward and I will give you each of you a thousand dollars," would you come to collect the money? I think so! I know if the situation were reversed, I would be the first down the aisle! Consider this: An elder has two children living under his roof who have been faithful, dedicated Christians for five years. The children cannot be accused of riot or being unruly. Both are in subjection to their father with all gravity. One of the children dies in an accident. The elder's ability to take care of his own house has not changed. He had the qualifications before the child's death and he retains the qualifications after the child's death. Nothing has changed! Clearly, scripture and logic support the conclusion that if a man has at least one child who is a faithful Christian, he is not, thereby, unqualified or disqualified. One who has but one faithful child is as qualified as one who has two or more faithful children.

When a man leaves home he is to "leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they two shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The man is no longer under the tutelage (guardianship, care, protection, teaching, and instruction) of the father. He has left his parents and begun a new home over which he is guardian, caretaker, protector, teacher, and instructor. What that person does after he leaves home should not be a determining factor in the subject situations, because when the child leaves his father's home to start a new home, the father's responsibility for the child terminates! He is to rule his own house well, which excludes his child's house!

Proverbs 22:6 does not teach that if our children are trained well they will never depart from the faith! Training a child "in the way he/or she could go" does not mean to train him or her as a Christian. It means to train the child according to, and in concert with, his natural abilities and talents. If we do this when the child is grown he will not depart from that for which he has been trained. To suggest that a properly trained child will never depart from the faith goes too far. In fact, such a suggestion clearly implies that it is impossible for the properly trained one to fall from grace which would be contradictory to such passages as Galatians 5:4; I Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 10:26-29, and many others.