

Back to Bible Basics

Issue 14

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE ELDERSHIP

Brett Rutherford

More and more error is being presented from our pulpits as the church of our Lord in Australia moves closer to the denominational view that the Scriptures are only a basic guideline for the governance of the church. Political correctness, convenience, and personal preferences have replaced plain directives in Scriptures. Clear Bible teachings on marriage, divorce, the woman's role, instrumental music in worship, and alcohol have often been dismissed as only being applicable to those in the first century. Perhaps the most frequent casualty of this trend is the Bible's teaching on the structure and qualifications of the leaders in the local congregations.

Why are Biblical directives about the way the local congregation is to be governed so frequently overlooked? Reasons for this oversight can be attributed to the rise of the feminist movement, personal ambitions, and the desire for leadership at all costs. The errors that are taught relating to congregational leadership vary greatly. Some of those errors will be addressed in this article.

The Scriptures make it clear Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:15-23), and that **QUALIFIED MEN** are to be appointed as elders in every congregation to guide and protect the church from error (Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17-31). The qualifications of elders are given in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Our assessment of who is qualified to serve as an elder in the local congregation must be based upon the directives given

in these two passages of Scripture.

Any faithful man can serve as an elder... I believe this is the most common mistake that congregations make when they appoint elders. Despite what our Mormon friends may teach, a single man (though faithful) may not serve as an elder (I Timothy 3:2). A married man who is faithful, but does not have faithful children also cannot serve as an elder (I Timothy 3:4, 5). A young, faithful Christian is also not qualified to serve as an elder (I Timothy 3:6). A qualified man must have an extensive knowledge of Scripture in order to serve. He must be capable of accurately expounding upon the Word of God, and know enough Scripture to identify threats to the local congregation (Titus 1:9; Acts 20:28-30).

Women can serve as elders... This idea that it is acceptable for woman to take on the office of an elder was unheard of in the churches of Christ a few years ago. The rise of feminism, and ignorance of the Scriptures, has opened the door to this idea that women can serve in leadership positions within the church. Women cannot be elders because the Bible specifically excludes them from taking this office. In the list of qualifications for elders in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 the Greek masculine pronoun "andros" is used in reference to those who are allowed to take on the office of an elder. "Andros" is a pronoun that is used only to refer to the male of the species. Furthermore, a woman cannot serve as an elder because she cannot scripturally be the "husband of one wife" (Titus 1:6). Women are excluded from taking any leadership role in the local congregation because she must not be placed in a position of authority over a man in the church or in the home (I Timothy 2:12-15; Ephesians 5:22, 23).

An elder does not need to be in control of his household... A man who is not able to manage his wife and his children has no Scriptural right to serve in a capacity where he must manage the affairs of the local congregation (I Timothy 3:4, 5). Even the innocent party in a divorce must dismiss himself from the selection process. He has not proven that he can control and manage his own household. A successful

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home life is an essential qualification for the role (1 Timothy 3:4a).

WOMEN AND BUSINESS MEETINGS?

Ian McPherson

No one would doubt that since 1972 when the "Equal Rights Amendment" became part of the US constitution, society has suffered the grave consequences of having women and men compete for roles in the home and in the church. God made them male and female in the beginning because He had a unique and noble purpose for both. (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18-19). Men and women were not created to compete with, but to complement one another.

CHRIST CHOSE MEN TO LEAD HIS CHURCH. *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:* (Ephesians 4:11-12). All of these leaders who were placed in the church by Christ were men. There are no instances in the New Testament where any woman was given a leadership position in the church. In spite of this clear fact, many, who are influenced by modern culture, are seeking to have women elevated into leadership positions.

One of the subtle ways that the women's movements are making inroads into the Lord's church is by churches allowing women to have voting rights in committees and business meetings. Although most still admit that elders are to be men (1 Timothy 3:2), some teach that in the absence of elders, churches should be led by "mixed business meetings" consisting of all the church. Two examples are usually presented to 'prove' this proposition.

The first example is Acts 15:22 ---- *"Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the **whole church**, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; ..."* How could this be an example of a business meeting in the absence of elders when both elders and apostles were present? This simply says that the whole church was pleased with the decision made by the apostles and elders.

The second example used is Acts 6:2-5 --- *"Then **the twelve** called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, 'It is not reason that we should leave the*

*word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, **brethren**, look ye out among you **seven men** of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom **we may appoint** over this business'"*. This verse referred to the coordination of a widow's programme overseen by the Jerusalem church. All the underlined people in the text were undoubtedly men. The "**apostles**" who oversaw the programme were all men, and the word "**brethren**" in the Greek language is in the masculine gender. In addition to this, the Greek word "aner" refers only to mature males and therefore proves that the apostles offered only the option of choosing males to be appointed.

The examples in Acts 15 and Acts 6 do not therefore prove that women should be included in business meetings. There is nothing wrong of course with congregational meetings being called by men to gauge the feelings of the church or to inform it of decisions made by the men. However, if women have voting power in church meetings and committees, then there is nothing to stop them from rising to other positions of leadership.

The difference between the use of women and men in home and church, is not a matter of discrimination but of role and function. For example, only Levites were to lead in temple worship, and the priesthood had to come exclusively from the descendants of Aaron (Numbers 1:50). This did not mean that the rest of the Israelites were inferior but simply that they had different role.

All of us recognize the great value of women in the church. The women's movement is robbing the church of its feminine softness. It should be clear to any observer that the value of a godly woman in either the home or the church is "far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10). However, God has not given her the place of leadership in the church. Men of God must therefore rise to the occasion and offer the godly leadership in the church that God demands of them.