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Let's Grow Up

By Mike Pace

"Brethren, be not children in mind; yet in malice be ye babes, but in mind be men." (I Cor. 14:20)

Have we complied with Paul's exhortation? Are we mature or immature?

Christian Maturity

If one is to achieve Christian maturity, at least five factors are involved:

(1) One must feast upon God's special food for the soul (Matt. 4:4; Heb. 5:11-14; I Peter 2:2). No man can live by bread alone, taught Jesus. The word of God is the food for the inner man, and, unless one partakes of it, he is certain to die of malnutrition.

(2) One must drink deep of the mind or attitude of Christ (Col. 2:16; Eph. 5:18, 19; John 4:10; 7:37; Phil 2:5). "But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Rom. 8:9). No one can conceive of Christ's mind being filled with malice and envy, with ill humor and animosity; nor can we conceive of Christ living a life of negligence toward God or man.

(3) Proper environment is essential to Christian maturity. Even the finest seed, if choked with briars and weeds and grass, can produce no great harvest. "Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals," wrote Paul (I Cor. 15:33). It is folly for us to needlessly expose ourselves to "the cares and riches and pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14).

(4) Christian maturity cannot be attained without exercise in spiritual affairs. Timothy was commanded to "exercise thyself unto godliness: for bodily exercise is profitable for a little; but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." (I Tim. 4:8). Actually, mature Christians are "those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil." (Hebrews 5:14).

Another translation renders the foregoing passage: "But solid food belongs to full-grown men who on account of constant use have their faculties trained to distinguish good and evil." Christianity in action in deed and in truth, not mere theory, is, of necessity, the mark of true maturity.

(5) When all is said and done, there must be growth, morally and spiritually, if Christian maturity is ever to be reached. Jesus grew "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:52). Christians must grow "in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (I Peter 2:2; II Peter 3:18). Our constant prayer is that the Almighty will give us countless thousands who continually make reasonable growth in grace, in faith, in patience, in self-control, in knowledge, in zeal, in moral courage, that the glorious church of God may grow more and more unto perfection. Such an one does not have to be carried about on a pillow. Rather, he is able, under God, to stand and fight the good fight of faith (Eph. 6:10:17).

Immaturity

What are some of the signs of immaturity? If one is so weak in the faith that he must be begged to attend the assembly of the saints, he is immature, even though he may have been a member of the church for forty years. One is immature, spiritually, when he blames others for his failures and lack of accomplishments. Hearts so filled with envy, hatred, jealousy, lust — hearts unable to entertain generous feelings toward others — are hearts dwarfed and immature. Another sure sign that one is suffering from a rather severe case of spiritual immaturity, is one's inability to live in peace with and to work in harmony with others. Surely, something is wrong when one keeps his "stinger" out, ready to challenge everything and everybody. The spoiled child thinks that he must have his way, regardless of what it might cost others. Who has not seen such a child sulk, pout, threaten, and otherwise make a nuisance of himself? The weak, the naive, the unstable are such nurslings, they cannot withstand the pressure of trials, persecutions, and hard-

ships; they find themselves carried about by every wind of doctrine (I Tim. 2:3,4; Eph. 4:13-16).

Brethren, let us stand ready to correct our defects and deficiencies; let us end our spiritual adolescence; let's fill up to the brim our inadequacies; let's become able to digest solid food and not have to be fed on milk all our days, and we shall become fullgrown in our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5:11-14).

The Corinthian brethren were reminded by Paul that they were yet babes, carnal, needing milk, unable to digest meat (I Cor. 3:1-4). Later, near the end of his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul exhorted them to, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong, let all that ye do be done in love." (I Cor. 16:13, 14). Here is found appropriate admonition for each child of God. Will you heed it?

Battling Brethren

By Dalton Key

Some folks just can't seem to get along with anyone. And a few of these rabble-rousers are in the church posing as children of God. Forgetting or ignoring Peter's admonition to "love as brethren", these Christian renegades "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which they have learned." (I Peter 3:8; Romans 16:17).

Will we never learn that battling among ourselves usually creates more problems than it solves? Such fights are almost never won. The apparent victor often compromises his integrity in the heat of battle to such an extent that for him victory becomes defeat. It has always been difficult to sling mud without getting muddy.

Because Christ deeply loves the church, he desires unity among her members. (Eph. 5:25; John 17:20,21). He taught the futility of a house divided against itself and charged his disciples to

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BATTLING BRETHREN

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love one another. (Matt. 12:25; John 13:34, 35). Paul described the united church as a body. "But now are they many members, yet one body . . . So we, being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." (I Cor. 12:20; Rom. 12:5).

Personal differences between individuals often lead to major divisions within the church. One united body is ever more desirable than two "bodies" meeting together under the same roof. When such a situation exists, it is usually not long until a visible "split" takes place. This split splinters the body into more than just two groups. Lloyd Connell has identified these splinter groups: "There is the group that stays in the church building. There is the group that starts meeting in another place. There is the group that scatters to other congregations. And then there is the group that is disgusted about the whole matter and falls by the way side, ceasing to attend anywhere." All this trouble and trauma from one or two trouble-makers who nurse a personal soul-sickness that sends them into spiritual delirium.

Perhaps before charging blindly into battle with other brethren we ought to make sure we are right and that our cause is worthy of defense. It just may be that our pride has clouded our reason to the extent that we "call evil good, and good evil." (Isa. 5:20). Does the Bible support my position? If so, is this a matter which relates to salvation and the soul; or is this a minor point of history, genealogy, or geography that has very little to do with our eternal destiny? It is easy to become so involved in striving to "be right" that

we find ourselves majoring in minors and minoring in majors.

Before waging war against our brethren, we might be wise to investigate and attempt to understand the other fellow's position. We just may be saying the same thing in different ways. Yes, we may have been in perfect agreement all the time. But even if I don't agree with your position, I should at least strive to understand it.

What about matters of opinion? We must never treat matters of mere opinion as if they were doctrinal tests of fellowship. Our opinion is really no better than anyone else's anyway. Is it right to estrange a brother and possibly divide a church because of insistence upon "our rights" and having "our way"? In all respects we should submit ourselves one to another in the fear of God. (Eph. 5:22).

Perhaps a generous dose of the golden rule mixed well with an equal portion of brotherly love would nip many a church problem in the bud.

The Authority of Elders

By Dub McClish

The problem of authority is always with us. Most of the world does not even recognize the existence of God anymore, much less his authority. There have been those in the church through the years who have sought to destroy the delegated authority God has given to bishops in the local churches, but generally such influences were rather isolated. However, parallel to the "anti-authority"; "anti-establishment" philosophy of the past fifteen years among many worldlings, there has been an ever-louder cry from within the church against the authority of elders: "What authority do elders have over their flock which that flock does not willingly give them? None!"; "Did any of us ever consider where we get New Testament authority for elders making decisions?"; "We are of the opinion that questions are safer in the hands of the 'church' than in the hands of any 'ship'"; "None of the qualittes mentioned in either Timothy or Titus have to do with decision making." These and many other such statements are indicative of this trend.

While some opine that the church is suffering from a growing "authority syndrome," it is my judgment that the direct threat is growing "anti-authority syndrome." I submit that God places a

plurality of elders-bishops-pastors over each local church in which men of spiritual qualifications can be found. I further submit that these men are charged with keeping their respective churches free from doctrinal error and moral pollution and that they are also charged with making decisions relative to the expedient exercise of the work of the church. Let us consider the scriptural evidence.

Words Referring to Elders and Their Work

The words chosen by the Holy Spirit to describe elders and their responsibilities are words that indicate the authority God has given them. All of the page numbers following the quotations below refer to *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*:

1. EPISKOPOS (and kindred forms), translated "bishop," "overseer," "oversight" (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:1-2; Tit. 1:7; I Pet. 5:2): "An overseer, a man charged with . . . seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent; . . . specifically the superintendent, head or overseer of any Christian church" (p. 243).

2. OIKONOMOS, translated "steward" (Tit. 1:7): "the manager of a household or of household affairs; especially a steward, manager, superintendent . . . to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures . . . a bishop (or overseer) is called *oikonomos theou*, of God as the head and master of the Christian theocracy" (pp. 440-441). If elders cannot make decisions or set policy, how can they be overseers, superintendents, managers or stewards?

3. POIMAINO (and related noun, poimen), translated "feed," "pastor" (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; I Pet. 5:2): "to feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep; . . . to rule, govern: of rulers, . . . of the overseers (pastors) of the church, . . . to furnish pasturage or food; to nourish" (p. 527). When shepherds see one of the flock straying toward a precipice, have they no authority to prevent a fatal fall? When they see a wolf devouring the lambs must they call all of the flock together before they can decide that he must be stopped and how to stop him (John 10:12)? Notice the use of *poimaino* in Revelation 2:26-27: ". . . to him will I give *authority* (exousian) over the nations: and he *shall rule* (poimaino) them with a rod of iron" (emphasis mine, DM). Admittedly, the word includes the element of feeding and tending, but also of ruling with authority.

4. PROISTEMI, translated "over," "rule": "to set or place before; to set over; to be over, to superintend, preside over, rule: I Tim. 5:17; I Thes. 5:12; I Tim. 3:4" (p. 539).

5. PEITHESTHE, translated "obey" (Heb. 13:17). The form in this passage is in the middle voice, meaning: "to listen to, obey, yield to; comply with . . . Heb. 13:17; James 3:3" (p. 497). James 3:3 speaks of the response of the horse to the bridle, a response to authority. The church is to obey its elders.

6. HEGEOMAI, translated "rule over" (Heb. 13:17): "to lead, to go before; to be a leader; to rule, command; to have authority over: a prince, of regal power; a governor, viceroy, chief; leading as respects influence, controlling or counsel; . . . the overseers or leaders of Christian churches: (p. 276). Admittedly this word includes the persuasion of one's influence, but it is also translated "governor" (Matt. 27:2; Acts 7:10). It is a word of authority.

7. HUPEIKO, translated "submit to" (Heb. 13:17): "to resist no longer, but to give way, yield; to yield to authority and admonition, to submit" (p. 638). This is what saints are to do in relation to their elders instead of trying to overthrow their authority. Each of the foregoing terms is either laden with authority or shows the proper response to the authority which God has given to elders.

Elders and Elders' Meetings

Some have hinted, while others have openly affirmed, that there is no scriptural basis for elders to even meet separately from the church in order to make decisions affecting the church. The first time elders are mentioned in the church is in Acts 11:30. Luke writes that the contribution of the church in Antioch for the brethren in Judea was sent "to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul." It was sent for any who had need but sent to the elders. Why? I conclude that they were to properly administer it, which required some decision making.

Some like to use the "Jerusalem Conference" (Acts 15:1-29) as an example of a decision reached by the "whole church," but careful reading proves otherwise. Paul and Barnabas were sent primarily to the "apostles and elders" to settle the question of circumcision (Acts 15:2). They first reported on their work to the whole church (Acts 15:4), but when the legalists raised the issue of circumcision, Luke states, the "apostles and elders were gathered together to consider of this

matter" (Acts 15:5-6). This was a separate meeting from that of verse 4. Paul's record supports that conclusion (Gal. 2:2, 9). Later, "the multitude" again listened to Paul and Barnabas as well as James (Acts 15:12-13) and expressed their agreement with the letter that was to be circulated to Gentile brethren (Acts 15:22). Luke describes the letter as "ordained of the apostles and elders" (Acts 16:4). Clearly, there was a separate, private meeting involving both elders and apostles in which this matter was decided rather than leaving it to a congregational vote.

As Paul returned from his third preaching trip he stopped at Miletus and called to him the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17). Upon reaching Jerusalem he met with the elders there (Acts 21:18). Obviously, it was not an uncommon practice for elders in the early church to meet separately from the church to discuss church business.

Elders and "Church Discipline"

There are three key passages of scripture that place the responsibility of leadership in discipline in the local church upon elders. Paul warns the Ephesian elders: "Grievous wolves . . . speaking perverse things, will draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore, watch ye" (Acts 20:29-31). A qualification of every elder requires that he know how to rule his own house so that he may "take care of the church" (I Tim. 3:5). Also, in the setting of the qualifications of elders Paul says that elders are to "convict the gainsayers" (unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers) who must be silenced (Tit. 1:9-11). Can responsible elders allow the church to be fed doctrinal poison while they timidly refuse to stop it? Those who would deny the authority of elders deny them the right to protect the flock from such dangers. If the foregoing words do not enjoin elders to lead the church in matters of discipline, giving them the authority to carry out the duty, what words would? How can such great responsibilities be fulfilled without some sober, prayerful, decision-making meetings?

In my judgment, it is most likely that the ones opposing the authority of elders with such zeal are ultimately aiming at their disciplinary leadership. If the authority of elders can be so undermined that they will not attempt discipline where needed or if, when they attempt it, the church has been so conditioned by false teaching that it will not follow the elders in the discipline, then the church is at the mercy of any doctrine or practice that

anyone might wish to establish. There is already a great famine of scriptural discipline among the churches. It is difficult to imagine what sort of worldliness one would have to practice or which false doctrine one would have to promote in order to draw even the mildest reproof in most churches. I suggest that a major contributing factor to this sad condition has been the gradually rising tide of teaching against the authority of elders. This has caused some elders to be uncertain of their own God-given authority and has caused some members of the church to reject the authority God has given these men.

Practical Consideration

Churches can function without elders but they are almost always handicapped and exist in an immature state. The ideal projected in the New Testament is to have scripturally qualified elders who function as true spiritual leaders in every church (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). It is neither practical or scriptural to leave the fate of a church in the hands of a "majority vote" arrangement where spiritual neophytes, doctrinal extremists, 12-year-old boys, etc., have as much voice as a loyal, seasoned saint. To prevent this very thing is why the Lord placed the local church under men who met strict qualifications, thereby proving their loyalty to Christ and his word. However, it is the stated intent of some to allow elders no more authority in a church than that of the newest, weakest, most radical, or youngest member. Should they succeed in their plans, it is very doubtful that any of them would long be content to live with the unscriptural situation they helped create.

Abuses of Authority

Those who reject all authority of elders except that exercised by "influence" often refer us to Peter's warning: "neither as lording it over the charge allowed you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock" (I Peter 5:3). The application usually made of this statement is to the effect that since elders are not to "lord it over" the flock, this precludes *any* exercise of authority. If this verse forbids the very authority that several other passages enjoin, then we have a serious contradiction in scripture. Contrariwise, there is no conflict at all between this verse and the authority-laden verses previously considered. The truth taught by Peter concerns the *proper exercise* of authority by elders to keep them aware of the possible temptation to abuse it. Anyone working under

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several elderships over a period of years will likely encounter an elder with a tyrannical spirit. I certainly have. In spite of the warning against the abuse of authority, it will likely continue because elders are human like the rest of us. However, an *abuse* of authority can never be rightly used to offset the *proper use* of authority. These men must certainly exercise the powerful leadership to be found in being an "ensample" (*tupos* — type, pattern). They are to represent to both the world and the church just what a genuine Christian is, and there is great power in such leadership. However, this power of example does not at all diminish the authority God has given elders.

Conclusion

With these truths before us, it is not difficult to see why the qualifications of elders are so strict and why the saints are commanded to obey them and submit to them. To rebel against them or to incite others to rebel against them out of selfishness, stubbornness, pride, jealousy or any other sinful motive is to rebel against the authority of God (Num. 16:1-35) and Jesus Christ (John 12:48).

Wise elders will counsel with their brethren and weigh their wishes in making decision about matters of expediency. They will also delegate much of the practical, detailed decision making to deacons and others. However, the final responsibility for making decisions in the local church in matters of expediting the work and keeping the church true to the Book will always rest upon the church's elders-bishops-pastors.

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How To Become A Christian

The most important question ever asked is: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Then the HOW becomes equally as important. Notice the step by step process. First, we must have faith in the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ. (Heb. 12:2). This faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God. (Rom. 10:17). "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. 11:6). With the belief and trust that Jesus is the Redeemer, we must repent of sins. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30). In repentance, we turn from sin, **STOP** serving Satan and **START** serving the Lord. (Matthew 3:8;

Luke 13:3). With this new attitude we are ready to confess our faith, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:9-10). Read Matthew 10:32-33. Acknowledge our faith, repentance and confession, the last step into Christ is baptism. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). Read Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38. Now that our past sins have been forgiven, the Lord has added us to His church and we are Christians. (Acts 2:47 and Acts 11:26).

BECOME A CHRISTIAN

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