

KNOWING AND CARING FOR THE CHURCH

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

The Living, Serving, and Meeting of the Elders

Scripture Reading: Exo. 28:29-30; 31:1-3; Zech. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:1-4, 8; Psa. 110:3; Prov. 4:18

I. The carrying out of God's New Testament economy in a particular place depends entirely upon the elders; it is an ironclad principle that the condition of the elders is reflected in the condition of the church:

- A. Whether the church is living and fresh and enriched depends on this one thing—that we are being filled continuously with the Spirit—Eph. 5:18:
 - 1. The wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill for the noble work of building up the church must be God Himself as the Spirit to us; only the Spirit of God can build His own dwelling place through us—Exo. 31:1-3; Zech. 4:6.
 - 2. In order to be filled continuously with the Spirit, we need to be those who are willing, empty, and praying—Phil. 2:13; Matt. 5:3, 8; Luke 1:53.
- B. A prayer ministry is a prerequisite for the administration and shepherding of a local church; the leading ones, those who minister the word in the church, should take the lead to have a prayer life—1 Tim. 2:1-4, 8; Acts 6:4:
 - 1. The first thing that the elders should do in caring for the church is to pray; instead of talking so much and even instead of working so much, we should pray more—Col. 4:2.
 - 2. All in the Lord's recovery should be prayerful and stand against the sin of prayerlessness; if we exercise ourselves to have a prayer life, the church will be living and uplifted—1 Sam. 12:23.
- C. The elders must advance and abound in the knowledge of the truth and pursue the growth in life unto their maturity in life; only the knowledge of the truth and the growth in life are able to produce the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones for God's building—1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 3:12a, 16-17:
 - 1. We must first gain the knowledge of the truth ourselves and then teach others these truths—1 Tim. 5:17b; 2 Tim. 2:2:
 - a. We must be constituted with the truths of the economy of God in the Scriptures according to the vision and ministry of the age; we must apprehend, understand, and know the truth for the building up of the church as the pillar and base of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15.
 - b. We must learn to visit people and endeavor to spread the truth—Acts 20:20, 32; Matt. 24:14.
 - 2. We must gain the rich experiences of life ourselves in order to minister life to others for their growth in life; we must be revived every morning and live an overcoming life every day in order to be good stewards of the varied grace of God for the building up of the church as the house of God and the kingdom of God—1 Pet. 4:10; Eph. 3:2:

- a. Morning by morning we must enjoy Christ as the hind of the dawn so that our path will be like the light of dawn to make us like the dew from the womb of the dawn until the day of the Lord's appearing dawns with Christ as the morning star rising in our hearts—Psa. 22—title; Prov. 4:18; Psa. 110:3; 2 Pet. 1:19; Psa. 119:147-148; Lam. 3:22-24.
 - b. Day by day we need to walk according to the spirit to live Christ for His magnification by the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and we need to walk in Him as the empowering One—Rom. 8:4; Phil. 1:19-21a; 4:13.
- D. The elders are those who “care for the church” (1 Tim. 3:5) as “patterns of the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3b):
- 1. They must have a good testimony in their living—1 Tim. 3:2-3, 7.
 - 2. They must be able to take the lead well—1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17.
 - 3. They must be apt to teach; they must also labor in word and teaching—v. 17.
 - 4. They must take heed to themselves and to all the flock—Acts 20:28.
 - 5. They must know how to shepherd; shepherding includes teaching—John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; Eph. 4:11.
 - 6. They must not lord it over the saints—1 Pet. 5:3; Matt. 20:26-27.

II. The principle of discussing matters in the elders' meetings is to let the Holy Spirit be the presiding One—Acts 15:6-12, 22, 28; Matt. 18:20:

- A. Whenever the elders come together, they need to pray themselves into the spirit; they need to pray their different understandings into the oneness.
- B. In the elders' meeting we should not elect someone to preside over the meeting; if we elect someone, we annul the authority of the Holy Spirit, and the meeting is offensive to the Holy Spirit.
- C. When the elders come together, if someone senses the leading within to mention a certain matter that needs a decision, he may mention it; then all may speak forth their feeling so that everyone may seek the Lord's leading together, according to the example of Acts 15.
- D. In the elders' meeting we need to learn to follow the Holy Spirit in discussing matters; thus, the elders should be real priests who have direct contact with God and seek God; their relationship with God should be so intimate that He can tell them His intention at any time—Acts 15:6-7a; James 2:23; Exo. 33:11a.
- E. When the elders follow the Holy Spirit in discussing matters, there is neither democracy nor autocracy but a theocracy, that is, the rule of God; God desires that we seek His instruction—Col. 1:18b; Dan. 4:26.
- F. In order to be infused with the instruction of God to care for the church, the elders must enter into the reality of “reading the saints,” just as the high priest in the Old Testament read the stones on the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim in the presence of God—Exo. 28:29-30:
 - 1. When the elders come together, they must bear the brothers and sisters on their shoulders, representing strength, and hold them in their heart, representing love—vv. 9-12, 29-30; S. S. 8:6.

2. If the church has a problem, and the elders need to see how the church should go on, they should go to God with much prayer; in the presence of the Lord through prayer, they can read the letters on the stones of the breastplate, which is to read all the members of the church, taking the members as the letters of a divine typewriter; then God's speaking will come to them, telling them what to do and how to do it.
3. The elders need not only the Bible and the Holy Spirit but also the brothers and sisters as the alphabet; this means that they need to bear the brothers and sisters before God and read the condition of every brother and sister before God; in this way the elders will know what God wants them to do and what God's present will is in the church life.
4. This is an excellent type in the Old Testament, and when it is realized in the New Testament, it preserves the principle of God's government.