

THE “MEN’S BUSINESS MEETING”**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

A recent survey of congregations throughout the United States revealed that 50% do not have elders and 54% of those that do have only two elders. That means that three quarters of our congregations either have no elders or are a heartbeat away from having no elders. I wonder how many of those congregations are actively preparing men to serve in leadership roles. How many, although they may not admit it, have become comfortable with the “Men’s Business Meeting” style of congregational leadership? As with many activities in life, the longer we do them the harder it becomes to change those habits. The harder it becomes for two or more men to separate themselves from the crowd and take personal responsibility for shepherding their flock, the harder it becomes for the congregation (especially the men) to accept and trust their leadership. Shortly after Paul established congregations on the island of Crete, he directed Titus to set in order the things that were lacking by appointing elders in every city (Titus 1:5). Who is fulfilling the role of being an example to the flock (1 Peter 5:3) if there are no elders? If a congregation is not organized as God intended or actively pursuing that organizational structure, can they avail themselves of the full spiritual blessings in Christ?

These are perilous times for the world at large and certainly the Lord’s church. Both are experiencing a crisis in leadership. Personal attacks from those in opposition to current and potential political leaders, who exhibit integrity and virtue, discourage these qualified men from serving in secular leadership positions. Unfortunately, many qualified men in the church refrain from serving because of the perceived hardships associated with the work of an elder. Shortly after I was appointed an elder, news of the appointment was announced at a board meeting of an organization associated with the church. The general reaction from these mature Christians both surprised and disappointed men. Statements such as “Buy yourself a Flak Jacket, the arrows are coming;” “Say good-bye to your wife and family, you won’t be seeing much of them from now on;” and “There go all your current social friends in the congregation” were heard from those around the conference table. Contrary to those comments, my eight years as an elder were, although not without challenges, the most rewarding of my Christian life. Our congregation may be the exception; but I pray it is not. God is searching (Jeremiah 5:1) for qualified men who will stand in the gap (Ezekiel 22:29-31) and lead His church.

Roman Centurions, mentioned numerous times throughout the New Testament, are excellent examples of sound leadership. They spent years in preparation for this position learning at the side of a Centurion. They led in battle from the front, wearing brightly colored plumes on their helmets in order to inspire loyalty and ownership of the cause in those soldiers under their command. Unlike Jacob, who (out of fear) allowed his wife and children to lead him toward perceived enemies, shepherds must be in the forefront of every battle, protecting and feeding their flocks. Although preachers are not to fulfill that role, in many congregations they perform as a “pastor” because of a void in leadership. This situation is not pleasing to God and those involved will one day answer for their actions or inactions.

A twenty-year-old single man who has completed high school and a twenty-year program at one of our preaching schools may be qualified for an entry level minister’s position. If that same young man desires to be a shepherd on day, he will require many years of spiritual growth, service, experience that brings wisdom, and the challenge of marriage and a family (1 Timothy 3:1-7). We must create an environment within our congregations that encourages younger men to prepare themselves for the work of a shepherd. As in all aspects of life, we accomplish what we plan to accomplish and that planning and the execution of that plan must originate with the elders or male leadership, including the preacher, of each congregation.

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

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As with our secular lives, balance is a key ingredient to success. Congregations that rush to appoint elders simply to have elders, without adequate preparation, will often create more problems than they solve. It is much better to be scripturally unorganized than to appoint unqualified men to watch over the flock. A balanced approach to leadership includes preparing men to serve. Start by identifying men with the potential to become elders or deacons. Place them in categories based on the estimated time it will take to prepare them for each position (1-3 Years; 3-5 years; 5-10 years). Assign an elder or mature male leader to mentor them in the development process. Then assess each man's developmental needs and create a plan to fulfill those needs. Sit down with each man and his wife, if married, and encourage them to continue to grow spiritually and strive to reach the goal of one day becoming a deacon or elder. Meet annually to assess the progress of each man and revise his developmental plan. The plans will be unique to each man, but can include daily Bible reading and related books concerning the church, elders, deacons, and various ministries, as well as attendance at sound lectureships. A recent workshop for elders in the Atlanta area conducted by two men with a wealth of experience was attended by only five of the area's fifty plus congregations. This apathy does not bode well for the church's current and future leadership. Developmental assignments within the congregation such as teaching, benevolence, local and foreign evangelism will prepare men for congregational leadership positions. Accompanying the elders and preacher on visits to visitors, shut-ins, those in hospitals, and spiritually weak members will help prepare them for the vital role of personally shepherding the flock. Teach them the importance of gaining the trust and respect of the congregation by accepting responsibility for their commitments and holding them accountable for their assignments.

Shepherds have an awesome responsibility in protecting and feeding their flocks as well as spreading the gospel. Their goal is to reach heaven and bring along as many souls as possible. Joshua 3:17 tells of the priests standing firm in the midst of the Jordan River allowing all of Israel to cross over on dry ground to the promised land of Canaan. Elders have that spiritual responsibility today. They are the bulwark against Satan. If faithful men will step up and stand firm, they will allow their flocks to reach the promised land of heaven.

Future leaders must be challenged to take personal responsibility for their preparation to lead, and they must understand the conditions for receiving God's blessings (James 1:22-25). They should not underestimate what they can accomplish (Philippians 4:13) when they honestly examine themselves (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Current leaders must be challenged to raise up men whose hearts are aflame with love, whose souls are full of faith and

“PREACHERITIS” AND “UNPREACHERITIS”

Preacheritis and unpreacheritis are two sad diseases which have become predominant in the church. Both of these diseases center around how congregations and individual Christians look at preachers. These diseases cause congregations to build around the preacher instead of the congregation being built around Jesus Christ. These diseases also can cause congregations to disintegrate because of the preacher instead of being unified because of Christ. Because of these diseases, many Christians either recommend a congregation or complain about a congregation in terms of the preacher.

Preacheritis infects the church in a variety of ways. Frequently it is heard that one should come to a particular congregation to hear the preacher. It is never the preacher that needs to be heard; instead, it is the message or Gospel of Christ that needs to be heard (Romans 10:10-17). Instead of inviting individuals to come and hear the preacher they should be invited to come and hear about Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:28-30).

Frequently it is said that preachers should be heard because of the delivery of their sermons. Some are bragged about because they can quote scriptures and preach without notes. Some are bragged about because they interlace their sermons with a variety of stories that attract attention. Some are deemed to be worthy of hearing because they are known because of their media work on television, radio, or in publications. Others are said to be exceptional because they use graphs, charts, or computer presentations during their lessons. When the preacheritis is stripped away, only one thing really matters. Did the preacher, to the best of his ability, deliver the message of the Gospel that needed to be delivered in a way that was pleasing to God? The apostle Paul wrote, “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Unpreacheritis is the open expression that one simply does not care for a preacher and desires his demise. Unpreacheritis is as damaging to the church as preacheritis is. Unpreacheritis believes that because a certain preacher does not meet one’s personal perceptions of a preacher, he should be removed. Preachers are as different as other people are different. It is sad however that often a preacher’s work is hurt because members fail to allow for personal differences. Instead of accepting the preacher for the abilities and good qualities that he has, he is frequently compared to the last five preachers that preached for a particular congregation. He does not have the personality of preacher two, he does not visit like preacher three, and he does not know the members like preacher one. How can individual survive being expected to follow the patterns, habits, and expectations of so many different people.

In the attitudes of unpreacheritis, preachers have not been hired or have been fired because they did not golf, throw a football with young people, know about hockey, or understand local customs pertaining to showers, weddings, and funerals. Preachers have been rejected because they did not use computers, understand internet and web sites or have a pleasant preacher’s voice. Ironically, preachers have been rejected because they are too young, middle aged, or too old. They have been rejected because they were not married, were married, had children, or did not have children. Preachers are rejected because they do not have a degree, they have a degree, they use too much scripture, they move too slowly or too fast in class or simply because the congregation needs to change and changing the preacher is the easiest change to make.

No congregation can be what God wants it to be until preacheritis and unpreacheritis are removed from their thinking and practices. A preacher is just a fellow laborer in the wonderful work of Jesus Christ. He is a man that has strengths and weaknesses. He is a man that stands before the judgment of God for every action he does and every word he speaks. He is a man that will be judged for his successes and failures alike. He is a man that needs God’s grace and forgiveness. He is a man that loves brethren and needs brotherly love. He is a man that does well and make mistakes. He is a man that needs man’s forgiveness and needs to be forgiving of men. Simply, he is just like you.

-David Dalton

vision, whose spirits are burning with zeal, whose lives are humble and selfless, who know the Book, who are afraid of being ashamed and ashamed of being afraid, who are set for the defense of the gospel, who will declare the whole counsel of God, and who will count the cost and be willing to pay the price. Our talents are a gift FROM God. What we do with those talents is our gift TO God.

As quote from Matthew Henry’s commentary on First Timothy is a fitting end to this discussion: “There ought to be an earnest desire of the office in those who would be put into it; if a man desire, he should earnestly desire it for the prospect he has of bringing greater glory to God, and of doing the greatest good to the souls of men by this means.”

-Jim Whitmire