

# Words of Truth



## There's No Scriptural Substitute For An Eldership

By: Brian A. Yeager

Let me begin by defining what the word "substitute" means. According to the Oxford American Dictionary, this term means: "a person or thing acting or serving in place of another". It is this usage of the word that I am using when writing this article. Thus, the subject of this article is that there is no authority, from the Scriptures, for churches of Christ to put **any arrangement or person** in the place of an eldership.

Certainly, we all should understand that the local church still has work to do when there is no eldership in place. Local churches of Christ existed, without elders, throughout the first century. Yet, this was not the situation the Lord wanted. Evangelists were sent to set things in order and appoint elders in congregations where there were none (Titus 1:5). Thus, while a congregation can exist and work without elders, it is not God's long-term design for any congregation.

Sadly, too many churches of Christ have become comfortable with the fact that they do not have elders. I hope this is not the case with us. This should never be the case. Having "men's business meetings", or any other arrangement, is not a Scriptural **substitute** for an eldership. Yet, many congregations have decided to find **substitute** arrangements comfortable. Many have created a new office in the church with these arrangements (i.e. men's business meetings, evangelistic oversight, congregational business meetings, etc.). Brethren, this is nothing more or less than church of Christ traditionalism. Having any arrangement standing in the place of an eldership is just as unscriptural as mechanical instruments of music in worship to God. Both are without authority from our Lord. Such traditions ought not be named among us (Mark 7:7-9 and Colossians 2:8). Not having authority for something makes it wrong (Leviticus 10:1-2, Numbers 9:1-8, Deuteronomy 4:2, Deuteronomy 12:32, II Samuel 7:1-7, Proverbs 14:12, Proverbs 21:2, Jeremiah 7:30-31, Matthew 12:46-50, Matthew 28:18-20, I Corinthians 4:6, Galatians 1:6-12, Ephesians 5:10, II John 9, and Revelation 22:18-19).

The word of God shows us that elders are to be in place in every local church of Christ. Notice what God says: "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (Acts 14:23). Brethren, we need to be working hard toward this goal.

### Qualified Men To Be Elders [Bishops / Shepherds / Overseers]

Like all other Scriptures, the following are key in our salvation. We all need to be working in helping this congregation proceed forward in having qualified elders. Thus, please notice the following qualifications for elders: "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour,

---

*given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; ( For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil... For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers”* (I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9).

The qualifications above are, for the most part, qualifications of all faithful men in Christ. While you do not need to be married and have children to go to heaven (Matthew 19:10-12 and I Corinthians 7:1-8), every other point above should describe all mature, Christian men. It is not a good commentary on us that we do not have an abundance of qualified men in this congregation. We need to fix that for the future well being of this local church. We should not be looking to find acceptable substitutes for our failures. As we've covered, there are no acceptable substitutes for an eldership.

### **Men's Meetings Or Congregational Meetings Are Not The Answers**

In some congregations there are a bunch of men who meet monthly and act like elders when they're not qualified to do so. The men of this congregation have no authority to act like elders when they are not elders. Nor do we have authority to appoint a denominational pastor system to run the Lord's body. Preachers are not substitutes for elders. Until we have elders in place, we are limping along when it comes to spiritual decision-making (cf. Acts 20:17-31). While men may be able to conduct some of the work of the church (Acts 6:1-3 and Acts 15:22-27), not all things can be done aright without elders (cf. I Peter 5:1-2).

In some "congregations" (using this term loosely) there is a practice where the whole church comes together to make decisions left for elders. In this arrangement women are often overstepping their boundaries that have been set in the word of God (I Corinthians 11:3 and I Timothy 2:11-12). This practice is not the answer either.

### **Conclusion**

Where there are no elders the local church is crippled. While we can look to the head of the church for decision-making (Ephesians 5:22-24), we do not have the wise counsel elders can provide. When (not if) we do have scripturally qualified elders, we will find much more safety than what we currently have (Proverbs 24:6). We will find true establishment of the works we set out to do (Proverbs 15:22). In the meantime brethren, let's all realize we're lacking in this area as a congregation. Let's realize that we're not fully accomplishing the Lord's will. Let's not look for unqualified men or unscriptural substitutions, but's let keep pressing on to raise up godly men to lead this congregation in the future.