

M. Church Conduct

by A.T. Pierson

The sermon discusses the importance of Elders in the church, the frequency of the Lord's Supper, and the manner in which church acts should be attended to.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:2

Topics: "Church Government", "Elder Leadership"

Description

A.T. Pierson preaches on questions regarding the eldership, emphasizing the importance of recognized Elders in every church, appointed by the Holy Ghost and confirmed by the possession of necessary qualifications. Believers are called to acknowledge and submit to these appointed leaders. Matters of discipline are to be settled in the presence of the church and as the act of the whole body, ensuring accountability and responsibility. The timing of church acts, such as reception and exclusion, is discussed, with a preference for addressing them during the Lord's day gatherings for the breaking of bread.

Transcript

I.-- QUESTIONS RESPECTING THE ELDERSHIP.

(1) How does it appear to be the mind of God that in every church, there should be recognized Elders?

Ans. From the following passages compared together: Matt. xxiv.45; Luke xii.42.

From these passages we learn that some are set by the Lord Himself in the office of rulers and teachers, that this office (in spite of the fallen state of the church) should be in being, even down to the close of the present dispensation. Accordingly, we find from Acts xiv.23, xx.17; Tit. i.5; and 1 Pet. v.1; that soon after the saints had been converted, and had associated together in a church character, Elders were appointed to take the rule over them and to fulfil the office of under-shepherds.

This must not be understood as implying that, when believers are associated in church fellowship, they ought to elect Elders according to their own will, whether the Lord may have qualified persons or not; but rather that such should wait upon God, that He Himself would be pleased to raise up such as may be qualified for teaching and ruling in His church.

(2) How do such come into office?

Ans. By the appointment of the Holy Ghost, Acts xx.28.

(3) How may this appointment be made known to the individuals called to the office, and to those amongst whom they may be called to labour?

Ans. By the secret call of the Spirit, 1 Tim. iii.1, confirmed by the possession of the requisite qualifications, 1 Tim. iii.2-7; Tit. i.6-9, and by the Lord's blessing resting upon their labours, 1 Cor. ix.2.

In 1 Cor. ix.2, Paul condescends to the weakness of some, who were in danger of being led away by those factious persons who questioned his authority. As an Apostle-- appointed by the express word of the Lord-- he needed not such outward confirmation. But if he used his success as an argument in confirmation of his call, how much more may ordinary servants of the Lord Jesus employ such an argument, seeing that the way in which they are called for the work is such as to require some outward confirmation!

(4) Is it incumbent upon the saints to acknowledge such and to submit to them in the Lord?

Ans. Yes. See 1 Cor. xvi.15,16; 1 Thess. v.12,13; Heb. xiii.7,17; and 1 Tim. v.17.

In these passages obedience to pastoral authority is clearly enjoined.

II.-- Ought matters of discipline to be finally settled by the Elders in private, or in the presence of the church, and as the act of the whole body?

Ans. (1) Such matters are to be finally settled in the presence of the church. This appears from Matt. xviii.17; 1 Cor. v.4,5; 2 Cor. ii.6-8; 1 Tim. v. 20.

(2) Such matters are to be finally settled as the act of the whole body, Matt. xviii.17,18. In this passage the act of exclusion is spoken of as the act of the whole body. 1 Cor. v.4,5,7,12,13. In this passage Paul gives the direction, respecting the exercise of discipline, in such a way to render the whole body responsible: verse 7,

"Purge out the old leaven that ye may be a new lump";

and verse 13,

"Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

From 2 Cor. ii.6-8 we learn that the act of exclusion was not the act of the Elders only, but of the church:

"Sufficient to such a man is this punishment [rather, public censure] which was inflicted of many."

From verse 8 we learn that the act of restoration was to be a public act of the brethren:

"Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm [rather, ratify by a public act] your love towards him."

As to the reception of brethren into fellowship, this is an act of simple obedience to the Lord, both on the part of the elders and the whole church. We are bound and privileged to receive all those who make a credible confession of faith in Christ, according to that Scripture,

"Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." (Rom. xv.7.)

III.-- When should church acts (such as acts of reception, restoration, exclusion, etc.) be attended to?

Ans. It cannot be expressly proved from Scripture whether such acts were attended to at the meeting for breaking of bread, or at any other meeting; therefore this is a point on which, if different churches differ, mutual forbearance ought to be exercised. The way in which such matters have hitherto been managed amongst us has been by the church coming together on a week-evening. Before we came to Bristol we had been accustomed to this mode, and, finding nothing in Scripture against it, continued the practice. But, after prayer and more careful consideration of this point, it has appeared well to us that such acts should be attended to on the Lord's days, when the saints meet together for the breaking of bread. We have been induced to make this alteration by the following reasons:

(1) This latter mode prevents matters from being delayed. There not being a sufficiency of matter for a meeting on purpose every week, it has sometimes happened that what would better have been stated to the church at once has been kept back from the body for some weeks. Now, it is important that what concerns the whole church should be made known as soon as possible to those who are in fellowship, that they may act accordingly. Delay, moreover, seems inconsistent with the pilgrim-character of the people of God.

(2) More believers can be present on the Lord's days than can attend on week-evenings. The importance of this reason will appear from considering how everything which concerns the church should be known to as many as possible. For how can the saints pray for those who may have to be excluded,-- how can they sympathize in cases of peculiar trial,-- and how can they rejoice and give thanks on account of those who may be received or restored, unless they are made acquainted with the facts connected with such cases ?

(3) A testimony is thus given that all who break bread are church members. By attending to church acts in the meeting for breaking of bread, we show that we make no difference between receiving into fellowship at the Lord's Supper, and into church membership, but that the individual who is admitted to the Lord's table is therewith also received to all the privileges, trials, and responsibilities of church membership.

(4) There is a peculiar propriety in acts of reception, restoration, and exclusion being attended to when the saints meet together for the breaking of bread, as, in that ordinance especially, we show forth our fellowship with each other.

Objections answered.

(1) This alteration has the appearance of changeableness.

Reply. Such an objection would apply to any case in which increased light led to any improvement, and is, therefore, not to be regarded. It would be an evil if there were any change respecting the foundation truths of the Gospel; but the point in question is only a matter of church order.

(2) More time may thus be required than it would be well to give to such a purpose on the Lord's day.

Reply. As, according to this plan, church business will be attended to every Lord's day, it is more than probable that the meetings will be thereby prolonged for a few minutes only; but, should circumstance require it, a special meeting may still be appointed during the week, for all who break bread with us. This, however, would only be needful, provided the matters to be brought before the brethren were to require more time than could be given to them at the breaking of bread.*

*The practice, later on, gave place to a week-night meeting, on Tuesday, for transaction of such "church acts." --A. T. P.

N.B. (1) Should any persons be present who do not break bread with us, they may be requested to withdraw whenever such points require to be stated as it would not be well to speak of in the presence of unbelievers.

(2) As there are two places in which the saints meet for the breaking of bread, the matters connected with church acts must be brought out at each place.

IV.-- QUESTIONS RELATIVE TO THE LORD'S SUPPER.

(1) How frequently ought the breaking of bread to be attended to?

Ans. Although we have no express command respecting the frequency of its observance, yet the example of the apostles and of the first disciples would lead us to observe this ordinance every Lord's day. (Acts xx.7.)

(2) What ought to be the character of the meeting at which the saints are assembled for the breaking of bread?

Ans. As in this ordinance we show forth our common participation in all the benefits of our Lord's death, and our union to Him and to each other (1 Cor. x.16,17), opportunity ought to be given for the exercise of the gifts of teaching or exhortation, and communion in prayer and praise. (Rom. xii.4-8; Eph. iv.11-16.) The manifestation of our common participation in each other's gifts cannot be fully given at such meetings, if the whole meeting is, necessarily, conducted by one individual. This mode of meeting does not, however, take off from those who have the gifts of teaching or exhortation the responsibility of edifying the church as opportunity may be offered .

(3) Is it desirable that the bread should be broken at the Lord's Supper by one of the elders, or should each individual of the body break it for himself?

Ans. Neither way can be so decidedly proved from Scripture that we are warranted in objecting to the other as positively unscriptural, yet--

(1) The letter of Scripture seems rather in favour of its being done by each brother and sister (1 Cor. x.16,17):

"The bread which we break."

(2) Its being done by each of the disciples is more fitted to express that we all, by our sins, have broken the body of our Lord.

(3) By attending to the ordinance in this way, we manifest our freedom from the common error that the Lord's Supper must be administered by some particular individual, possessed of what is called a ministerial character, instead of being an act of social worship and obedience.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net