

Bristol Conference 1977-10 n.t.church Discussion

by Stan Ford

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the New Testament Church, its foundation in Christ, and the marks of a local church, including the preeminence of Christ, the presidency of the Holy Spirit, the priesthood of every believer, the principle of separation, and the prominence of the scriptures.

Duration: 58:46

Scripture: Matthew 18:15

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the role of elders in the local assembly and their responsibility to care for the sheep. He shares a story about a man in Palestine who was driving a flock of sheep and when asked if he was the shepherd, he replied that he was the slaughter man. This story highlights the importance of true shepherding and the need for elders to lead and guide the sheep. The speaker also addresses the issue of believers marrying unequally yoked partners and suggests that it is a matter for the elders to handle.

Transcript

...as it is, without establishing a basis of the New Testament Church's need for elders. And that reads through. If either our brother Phillips or myself wish to make a comment, we will.

Now, this is a cross between a Bible reading and a panel discussion, and that's... We have some written questions turned in already. We'll ask for others. There'll be discussion by the panel, and then we'll give opportunity for brethren from the floor to make comments.

But we do prefer written questions. If you give us a written question, we can read it up here, and then it can be discussed. Now, after our brother Ford speaks, then there may be questions in your mind, you know? And if there are, my Warren Parrish is going to walk around, and he'll have cards, and just raise your hand, write out your question, and there's a salvation to this thing.

You don't need to put your name on it. So just write out your question. Now, without any further ado, let us order.

May I take just two or three moments by the way of introduction? All I've ever really known is assembly fellows. I'd never been to church or chapel or Sunday school in my life until I was a man, and I trusted the law. I was saved in a tent mission, and found out that the tent mission was being run by the local gospel hall.

When I went into the gospel hall, I thought all churches were like this. The only thing I couldn't understand was there was no one who toddled around with a clerical collar on, as they do in my country. I say that because, quite often, I come across men and women who, when speaking of the things of the Lord, and especially of a church principle, they say, well you were brought up in this.

There is a sense in which I have been brought up in it, it's all I've known. But there is also another sense in which we've had to pay--my wife and I --about a very deep cost for being there. I have two children.

When my daughter was 21 years of age, she came and saw me and said, Daddy, we want to get married. And I thought she was only a girl. And I looked at her and I said, well, yes.

And I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to even say. I didn't want to get rid of her.

And a couple of years later, and I can see her now, her tears welled up in her eyes, and she said, Daddy, I don't think you've got the right to ask me that. And I didn't know what to say. And I said, of course I have, I'm your daddy.

She looked at me and burst into tears, and she said, I've never had it. And that was right. I'd been 32 years in the service of the Lord, and ever since my little girl could almost know, I'd hardly ever been home.

My wife and myself say the fact that in the service of God, amongst the assemblies of God's folk, in my country especially, there was no chance of just being sent. After about eight, nine years of serving the Lord, I was down in Pembrokeshire in Wetwell, and I was offered Hill Park Baptist Church, the largest Baptist church in Wetwell, an independent Baptist church, at least an affiliated Baptist church, and I was offered this church. There were a whole mass of us right then, and I wanted to take it.

I wanted to take it because I got fed up of being away from home. And I said to Mary, Mary, what are we going to do? And she looked at me and she said, Sam, are we where God wants us to be, or are we where we want? And we settled down to a month of earnest Bible study as to why I was where I was, and by the to be perfectly honest, it was the first time I'd ever really done it. I could have given you all the answers to why I gathered with the people I did gather with, but previously it had not really affected me, and now it did, and we stayed where we were.

The thing that punished me forever was the priesthood of Albany. This very year, before I came over to America, I faced that same problem. I was invited by the committee in charge of the Penn Hall in Blackstone, the largest gospel mission in Great Britain, to submit my application to be their superintendent.

It didn't take very long for me to write back and thank them for their great mercy, but to say no. Now, I've taken those two or three moments to say extremely personal things, but I've taken them because I want you to understand that I am not with the people that are known as brethren just because they're a nice people to be with. I am with them out of real, absolute Bible conviction, and it has cost us something to be here.

With that in mind, may I please speak of what I believe to be the very broad There are many other things, as you will well understand, very broad principles of a New Testament Church. A New Testament Church, not many other churches, a New Testament Church. Would you turn with me, please, into the great 17th chapter, 16th chapter, rather, of the gospel of Matthew.

Matthew chapter 16, we do. Three things I said the other day, speaking somewhere, I'm not quite sure where, but I said that the 16th chapter of Matthew was in the 17th chapter, and that is absolutely true, and it is extremely profound. You see, you cannot get into the 17th chapter and climb the mountain and see the Lord's hand figure until you stay for a while in the 15th chapter.

The secrets of the Lord are with those that fear him. In the 16th chapter of Matthew, the Lord Jesus unfolds three secrets that he has never unfolded before. He unfolds the secret of his church, verse 18.

He unfolds the secret of his cross, verse 21, and he unfolds the secret of his coming in the last two verses. He's never unfolded these things before. And in verse 21, I'm sorry, verse 18, we read, and I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

What tremendous words they are. Did you know the Lord is making a play on two, no need to take the baby out, brother, I don't mind a baby crying, I just think it says amen, no one else does. Don't you? You bother about the baby now.

If you can't manage it, you hand him up, I can preach in your church as well. Now, I think, please, I think that's essential, because the church is a place for the family. Don't forget that.

But, he says, thou art Peter. The Lord is making a play on two Greek words, as you know. He says, thou art Peter, thou art Petra, a piece of rock.

And then he says, but upon this rock, not Petra, but Petra, upon this mass of rock, I will build my church. He's not saying he'll build his church on Peter, he's saying he'll build his church on this mass of rock. No need for me to remind you of one Christian's events, the tremendous words of the 11th verse of the third chapter, out of foundation no man lay than that which is laid, Christ Jesus, Christ Jesus.

So, here you see the very principle of the Christian church, it's based upon the Lord, it's foundation is Christ. So, please, this is the church universal, and there's a difference between the church universal and the church local. The church universal includes every born of the same child of God, and I want you to understand that if you love the Lord Jesus, and yet you don't gather just the same as I gather, you are my brother, you are my sister in Christ, and you are as much in the church as I'm in the church.

But I don't think you're in the local church. You see, I believe there is a local expression of a universal church. That local expression, the church at Bethlehem, the church at Corinth, the church at Philippi, the church at, and of that church there are commandments given which tell us that there are certain people who are not walking orderly who can be put out of fellowship of that church.

But you can't be put out of fellowship of the body of Christ. You can't be put out of fellowship of the universal church if you can't be a local church. Now, what are the marks of a local church? I gave a series last week, I told what I thought, let me try and change it.

Let me say that as I open my Bible and read it and ponder its truth, it seems to me that, first of all, a local church is a place where the preeminence of Christ is acknowledged. The preeminence of Christ is acknowledged. When I turn to the glorious words of Ephesians 1 and 22, when I go way under to Colossians and in that 18th verse of the first chapter, I see that Christ is the head of the church.

I see that in this church he will have the preeminence. How important it is for us to remember that. Brethren and sisters, I want to gather in a church where the center, where the gathering point is Jesus Christ.

When I first was converted, I used to hear, it seemed to me, of course it was so, but it seemed to me every time I heard any brethren minister, I used to hear these dear brethren speak of Christ as the one to whom we gather. I don't often get to hear that. Maybe I ought to say it a little more.

But I know of no center for a local church but Jesus Christ. He is the preeminence of Christ. He is the head of the church, and I want to be in a company of popes that does not acknowledge at its head a committee in some far-flung country or far-flung city, but I want to be amongst a company of popes that acknowledges at its head Jesus Christ right there with them, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

And I don't gather to the gospel chapel, and I don't gather to the gospel hall, but I gather to Jesus Christ. He is the center of the church, where Christ is the preeminent one. But not only where the preeminence of Christ is acknowledged, but where the presidency of the Holy Spirit is acknowledged.

The presidency of the Holy Spirit. You see, I believe there have been great difficulties over the years. There have been difficulties when the church historically had problems concerning God the Father, and then they had problems concerning God the Son.

It seems to me they're having problems today concerning God the Holy Spirit. But when I gather in church capacity, I want to gather where the Spirit of God is at liberty to lay on the heart of any brother in that gathering what he wants me to know. And to the led of the church, wasn't it a glorious thing, Lord say morning, to be here around the table? Just to say, oh, one brother or another, did you not feel it? That the Lord was really leading us.

There were none of these brethren who got together before the meeting, and sort of said, now what are you going to take, brother? I'd like to follow that. But not only in the morning meeting, the presidency of the Holy Spirit and the whole affairs of the church. But then I believe a local church is not only a place where the preeminence of Christ is acknowledged, and where the presidency of the Holy Spirit is acknowledged, but where the priesthood of every believer is acknowledged.

And this, to me, is the dear, dear, the priesthood of everyone. And brethren and sisters, it may open up discussion later on, but don't let us forget this, that you sisters, the holy priests, as well as these brethren, may be called as Old Testament priests were to different offices. But is it wonderful that I don't need a man to stand between me and God? Is it wonderful to know this, that every believer is a priest when Peter writes his lovely letter, you remember? He says, speaking of Peter and Apollos, he doesn't say, we are a holy priesthood.

He says, ye are a holy priesthood. Ye are. I want to acknowledge the priesthood of every believer.

And I want to say something to you, brethren. Don't you sell your priesthood. I don't mean sell it by allowing someone else to do it, but sell it by not using it.

I sometimes, I don't know, a hymn book's a lovely thing, but this isn't one, but a hymn book's a lovely thing. Don't you forget this, that God's more concerned with the praise that springs from your heart, your audible prayer, than he is even of a hymn that's been written years ago. And I find over here that you come to your chapels with two books, a little black one and a big black one.

You use your little black one more than you do your big black one. That's all I've got, that ends it now. The priesthood of every believer.

I believe the local church is not only a place where the preeminence of Christ is acknowledged, but where the presidency of the Holy Spirit is acknowledged, where the priesthood of every believer is acknowledged, but where the principle of separation is acknowledged. The principle of separation is acknowledged. When there's only one knock, they turn to God, and I go, finish with God.

What can I say of the tremendous words of 2 Corinthians 16-17, come ye out from among them, and be ye set free. I believe that a local church is a place where the principle of separation is acknowledged, where the prominence of the scriptures is acknowledged, where what we do is not what is expedient, but what's safe to the scripture. Then, last of all, I believe that a local church is a place where the position of elders can be concentrated, your appreciations and address on stone, and a week of address, weekly.

And, but brethren, these are the things I believe, that I want to hold on to. These are the things that is part of my life, and I'm not going to give them for anything. I believe they're precious, so I'd give us a deeper appreciation.

If I took longer than I should, I'm not a bit sorry. What you have said, Brother Ford, is not only what you believe, it's what the Word of God teaches. My experience will be very brief, as I make a comment that's a little bit different from yours.

Someone asked a young man, I'm in the same position, how long he was associated with assemblies, and I have to give the same answer. Nine months before I was born, my mother and father were in the assemblies before me, my wife's people, so we were brought up there. And I've had people talk it back to me, well, you're where you are because you were born there, and you're brought up in that.

No, about the age of 17 and a half, I was advised to leave home and board away from home. God rooted me and grounded in these things because of godly elders, and I can still remember them. I'll just give you one little experience.

I remember at the age of about 18, going to the table, in those days we went to the table, and gave thanks for the emblems. And a dear brother, a nice little white goatee, came and put his arm around me after, and tears streaming down his face, this is what he said, and there were words of encouragement. Brother Fred, I'm sure you're the brother that Lord wanted at the table this morning.

That's the kind of elder he was. He put his arm around someone and encouraged them and helped them. I was just one church that I would like to have been in, and it isn't Queensborough, it isn't Durham, it isn't Kenilworth.

I would like to have been in the church in Antioch. The Holy Ghost said that. I'd like to be in a church where the Holy Ghost is free to speak.

Speak to his people from his word, whether it's from elders or someone else. Now, I don't know whether you'd like to make a brief comment or whether you want to pass. What shall the man say that cometh not to the king? There's the king.

I'm only the president. There's the king. Well, brother Fred, like yourself, I was brought up in the assemblies.

I was carried there as a baby, and as far as the Ecclesiastical Fellowship is concerned, it's the only thing I've ever known. But I have been in a broader communion, in a sense, for 11 years. I was on the staff of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and there we were joined together in gospel fellowship with the whole spectrum of the Christian church.

But that's the church universal. That is the expression of the oneness of the body. As far as the local fellowship is concerned, it is my firm belief that it's the local assembly that gives the best expression to New Testament fellowship.

In just carrying what brother Sam said one step further, in chapter 16 of Matthew, we have the very first mention of the church in the New Testament, and it's mentioned, of course, by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. It's the church universal, and then you have that experience on the mount. But in the next chapter, in chapter 18, you've got the second mention of the church in the New Testament, and that also is the Lord's revelation of the church.

And in Matthew 18, you don't have the universal church, you have the local church. There are three things in that chapter which are of some interest in connection with this second mention of the church. In the opening verses, verses 1 to 10, we have the reception of the believer.

Except he be converted and become as little children, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receive it me. That's the first great truth connected with the local assembly, is the reception of the believer.

Then in verses 11 through 14, you have the restoration of the backslider. The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost. How think ye if a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone as trash? Then the rest of the chapter, from verse 15, you have the reconciliation of brethren.

If thy brother shall trespass against thee, and so on. It's in this immediate context that the Lord gives us the second great reference to the church. Matthew chapter 16 is expounded in the epistle to the Ephesians, and Matthew chapter 18 is expounded in the first epistle to the Corinthians.

So, we have the universal church and the local church, and of course it's where the local church Brother Stanton has intimated that we're concerned this afternoon. We do have certain gifts doing up that the risen head gave, and when he ascended on high, he gave, and I heard someone say he gave gifts to the church. That's what one of the religious groups says.

He gave gifts to men for the blessing of the church. There are the evangelists, and there are the pastors, and there are the teachers, and there are the elders. Now, are they a distinct company, or are they just not

known at all? Were they a distinct company in apostolic days and in the early church? Could you tell who they were? Don't be timid.

Oh, Acts 20 is quite clear about that, isn't it? "...over whom the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers." Remember that the apostle had come to Miletus, and he sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus. He knew where they were. They knew who they were.

He sent for them, and they came to see him. You'll remember, of course, that when they made the collection for the saints, they sent it to the elders of Jerusalem. They knew who they were.

They knew where they were. They sent them money. They received it.

Oh, there's a definite acknowledgement of who elders are. "...and addressing the church at Philippi, he addressed them including those who are the bishops or who are the elders." Now, maybe we ought not to pass the usual comment about that, don't we, Mr. Grant? Yes. Go ahead.

I thought you were going to say that. Do let us remember that the word bishop and elder is the same word, and when the apostle writes to the church at Philippi, he writes to the elders. Plural, not one bishop over many churches, but many bishops in one church.

Now, let's forget that. It's a very simple principle, but it's a tremendous principle. Many, many bishops in one church, not one bishop over many churches, at Ephesus.

Now, what is one of the subjects we want to discuss this afternoon? What is the work of an elder? A number of facets to his work. Does that come first, Grant, or the character and the qualifications of an elder? We were pulling a switch this week, and we should have told you last week, just to make it different because I'm right here. Last week, we did take that up first, and we thought today we would take this up and then come back to it with your permission.

Come back to the qualifications. John, that little outline you've got on a bishop in your book, I'm not selling the thing, but that little outline you've got on Titus is one of the nicest I've seen. Does anybody have a copy of Exploring the Scriptures, sir? Now, is there a commercial you're doing? They're in the book.

I know him well enough. But it's in your hand, please. Maybe you want to share that for us, sir.

I don't carry it around in my head. Have you forgotten what you wrote? Come on, that doesn't matter. Sorry.

Well, there we are. That's one of the best that John wrote on Titus, a little outline on a bishop. So is this.

Go ahead, brother. I don't mind if you preach my own line. Amen.

That one I always do. Maybe we ought to turn to Titus, did we? Go on, you do it. No, go ahead.

I really don't carry all these out, do I? No, well, I appreciate it. You know, the first thing I've got to do is find Titus. He's jumped out of my Bible.

Isn't that awful? Timothy. It's on page 1,283. Ah, it's 1,167.

He says, when speaking of an elder, the Apostle says a number of things. Where do we start? I don't know what that is. He's jumped out of my Bible.

Yes, I'm looking in chapter 2. No wonder I couldn't find it. I'm looking in chapter 2. You don't do things like that, do you? You don't do things like that. First chapter, if you please.

He says, well, this is what I'm looking for. I can't express strong enough that if experience goes for anything, and I think it does a little, that this does not necessarily mean apt to preach. I come across quite a number of folk who imagine that because a person is an elder, therefore he's got to preach.

Now, this is not so, but he's got to be able to teach. He's got to be able to go into a home and speak with those that come to him, and explain to them the word of God. Now, I come across a number of people in the course of my travel who are wonderful elders.

They're very apt to teach, but they're not apt to preach. Not apt to preach. So, I think the purpose here of the work of an elder is that he must be a man who is able in the assembly fellowship to teach the people in that fellowship the word of God.

That's the purpose. What's the difference between teaching and admonishing? We just read of admonishing here. There is a difference.

Is it teaching setting forth the positive truth of the word of God, error comes in, or people get out of line as far as their conduct, and they must be admonished, they must be warned? And maybe most of you aren't aware of it, but today in evangelical circles, as well as in the assemblies, there are truths creeping in. You may say, well, he means charismatic. Well, that's only part of it.

That's only part of it. Things in connection with the person of Christ, the work of Christ, right down the line. And I think we need more and more good, solid teaching from the word of God, so that when someone comes along... Now, there's an article written not too long ago, and I won't tell you where it was, but it was all wrong, from this particular magazine, one of our magazines.

And a young man had only been saved two years, came one night for a little Bible study, said there's something in here. Now, don't tell me that a babe in Christ can't be protected if he reads his Bible. God will protect him.

And that's on the spot of this, and he was absolutely right. Things said about the person of Christ were dead wrong. He said this can't be right, and he was right.

There's a great need to instruct, and there's a great need to warn. Don't always be taken up by all the heresies and the cults and all the rest. You'll never have time for the truth of God.

But I think there's a great ministry that's needed here. A brother came into our assembly and made this statement, a brother from the mission field. We won't identify him, and he said this.

From that time forth, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must be crucified. It was then that he became aware of the fact that he was to die on the cross. You can't have that.

And I'm glad that the elder stepped in. And you must step in. Any word from you, brethren, on this teaching and admonishing? Any further words? Well, it presupposes a thorough knowledge of the Bible.

Amen. And amongst us today, there are an increasingly few men with a thorough knowledge of the Bible. You don't get a thorough knowledge of the Bible by all of a sudden, when you retire from business, deciding you're going to get it.

I remember years ago, Brother R.J. Little, he was in fellowship in the Chicago Assembly. He was the radio pastor of Moody Boblins for many, many years. I heard him say on one occasion to a brother who said to him, I wish I had your knowledge of the Word.

He looked at him, and he said, You're too late. He said, You'll never have my knowledge of the Word of God. Sir, he said, If you wanted my knowledge of the Word of God, you should have started 20 years ago.

But it's never too late to start. And if we want to be able to admonish, and to deal with error, and to teach people the truth of the Word of God, we've got to know it ourselves. And that takes time.

And it takes time consistently spent in the Bible over a long period of time. And it's certainly a goal that we should all be going in for. It's one of the basic works of an elder is to be able to take the book and expound it.

Somebody comes to us and says, a Mormon was at my house this afternoon, and he said this and this and this. Are we able to give an answer? We should be. If you have any comment, if you raise your hand, or questions, we'll try and answer it as we go along.

Brother Ford, in Hebrews 13, it says that they are to have the rule. Does that mean dictation? Oh, an elder is not a dictator. He rules his own house, takes care of the church, the Bible says, takes care.

But God has set men over us, and we accept the deliberations of those, not in the singular, but in the plural, of those that he has set over. In many things, if experience goes anywhere, in many things I have found this, that when elders sit down to deliberate on a particular matter, they have before them the entire story. Normally speaking, when a matter arises, it's only one side that one person hears.

But the elders sit down, and they have the whole story, and the care, and the fellowship of the church of God that we have, indeed. Younger men have to submit themselves to those that are older, and to the elders of the church. And I think that this is a correct procedure, and a right procedure, and a procedure that we don't teach enough, and we don't practice enough.

But it's not a dictator in the church, one man. This is why God has set elders, not an elder. This is why it's in the plural, not in the singular.

Isn't the great thought behind being an elder the thought of being a shepherd? And it's interesting that God's kings in the Old Testament were shepherd kings. God's ideal king was David. His ideal ruler was a man like David.

And again and again, the various kings in the history of the Old Testament are compared with the gold standard. It says he did this as did David his father, or not as David did. David had set up the standard of God's ideal king, and David was a shepherd.

The difference between David and King Saul, King Saul looked after his father's asses, and he couldn't even look after them. He lost them when he was first introduced. He can't even find them.

That's the heart of Saul. You drive an ass, but you lead a sheep. And it came out in Saul's character as a king, and in David's character as a king.

David was a shepherd. And that's what God's thought is behind rule, whether it's in the kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament or in the local church in the New Testament, the idea of being a shepherd. And if we

would get into our Bibles and find out something of shepherding, then we would have the whole idea of being an elder.

It means having a heart of a flock. It means being ready to stand between the flock and the wolf. It means spending many a sleepless night out on the hill somewhere looking after one that's gone astray.

Being a shepherd is being an elder. I think that 17th verse of the 13th chapter says, Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they must give an attempt that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is uncomfortable for you. So you see, it's not ruling from the sense of a dictator, but watching for them, and caring for their souls.

We had a good brother came to our fellowship and gave a series of slides on the trip that he'd made to Palestine. And I never forget one little story he told. You may have heard others tell it, but I heard him tell it.

But as they were going along, they saw a flock of sheep being driven. And he goes to the man, and he speaks to him, and he said, I always was told that the shepherd lead the sheep in Palestine. And the man looked at him and said, yes, but I'm not the shepherd, I'm the slaughter man.

There's the difference. One was driving, and he was driving the slaughterhouse. The shepherd was leading, and he was leading the pasture.

In connection with what our brother Phillips has said, and as to David, and a very sweet comment I read in connection with David is really in connection with Samuel. Samuel had a great ministry, did he not? And Samuel's ministry, Samuel's greatest ministry, I believe, is a ministry, one of the ministries of an elder. Someone said that Samuel's greatest ministry was to introduce to the nation the man who, after God's own heart.

And an elder has that type of ministry. It's the ministry of Christ, the person of Christ, the work of Christ. This is what fills up God's people.

You made a comment about the elders meeting together, Brother Ford. I had a question handed here. Should the elders meet together, or should they carry on their work individually? I know it answers itself, but here's the next question.

It's been asked two or three times on the ground. If one of a group of elders is not doing any of the work of an elder, what should be the attitude and action, if any, on the part of the other elders? Shall I read it again? This was asked last week and again this week. If one of the group of elders is not doing any of the work of an elder, what should be the attitude and action, if any, on the part of the other elders? And this is a serious thing.

It is true that there are men that have been listed as elders, shall we say. This was told us last week. And he isn't doing the work anymore.

Now, what's to be done about it, if anything? The first thing I think that we need to consider is that one of the works of an elder is to admonish. And it's interesting that the questioner put it very nicely. I thought, extremely nicely, whoever put that question in, thank you.

Thank you for the nice way you put it in. What should the other elders do? Well, if the work of an elder is to admonish the flock, I would have thought that the work of an elder was to admonish an elder that's not doing the work. And I would think that it would come from the elders.

I think that was put so nicely, you know. Generally, that sort of question is, what shall we do? And of course, so they do. Well, I think you laid the basis for it, though.

An elder is meeting together. And there must be mutual confidence, mutual trust, mutual fellowship. And if one brother isn't carrying the load so to speak, isn't doing the work, he's just there in name, they should admonish him.

And if that's necessary, brother, it wouldn't be well for you to step aside for the time being. Now, you may say, that's strong language. Who are they to do it? Well, if he isn't doing the work, he's only a hindrance.

He's not any help at all. Is that too strong? I don't think it's too strong. Last week, the last day, I came to the conclusion that during the course of the week, we might have been giving a little wrong impression.

We were working, dealing so much with the work of elders, that I was a little nervous that at the end of the week, we might have given the impression that the elders were the head of the church. Now, brothers and sisters, don't let us forget this. The elders are not the head of the church.

Christ is the head of the church. Christ is the head of the church. And if Christ is the head of the church, the head controls the whole body.

Isn't that true? If there are things that happen among elders that we feel in the church of God maybe shouldn't be so, and let's make sure that we are scripturally correct in this matter, then we have a remedy. I said this, that I believe there are too many of us, and I'm not just trying to be funny, but I think there are too many of us who wear our trousers out in the wrong place. If we got on our knees a little bit more than sat down, if we told the Lord a little more of it, and he's the head of the church, and he's concerned with the body, the Lord knows whether we are being fed.

I see many an elder prayed away from the fellowship of elders. At Corinth, they were told to take an action. Who did Paul tell to take that action? I'm not disputing what you said about Christ being the head of the church, but who did he say was to take that action? To whom was it addressed? The elders of the whole church.

Had he not addressed the church of God at Corinth and said, put away from among yourselves, now the elders might have carried it out, the elders only really acting on behalf of the others under the direction of the head. They're no superior group, they have no superior authority, they're guides, they're leaders, they're to show the way, they're to shepherd, they're to feed, it's a tremendous job. I think in the sense of the Corinthian epistle, that the instruction also was of the church.

In other words, if elders discipline by putting out the fellowship of the church, it not only accepts that discipline, but also practices that discipline. Well, here's one that sits apart from the regular, but Brother Ford would answer, I'm sure. I'm feeling I'm doing all the talking.

Come on, John. No, no, no. If an elder is asked now to officiate at the wedding of two unsaved people, should he do so? Would you answer that? Oh, yes, yes, almost definitely.

Almost definitely. Marriage was not given to the church. Now, would you notice, please, two unsaved people.

Not an unsaved person, a saved person. Two unsaved persons. Marriage was not given to the church.

Marriage was given to the world. And it is of God that men and women shall be legally married. And I have officiated at a number of weddings where neither of them are saved.

But I tell you something, the four there have that knot tied. They know how to be saved. Well, they do.

And I'll tell you something more, that again and again I have seen, those folk, maybe they never came to the gospel hall before, that where they were married. And there's a link. When I go and knock the door, there's a link.

Oh, yes. I'm not speaking, please, of unequal youth. I am speaking of two unconverted people here.

And marriage is of God. Marriage is of God. I rather enjoy the statement of your president when he said to some of the folk who are working wherever they work, go and get yourselves married.

I don't think there's anyone I've referred to here like that. I am sure you will understand that we are not trying to decide all issues here. Having said that, I say a big amen to what our brother Ford has said.

I have felt free to do exactly that same thing in that particular connection. We are not here to settle issues. We are here to unfold the word of God.

And you've got to apply it in your own local conditions and your own local circumstances. Can we go another direction? Here's a question that has been written out. What is the scriptural procedure for becoming an elder in a local assembly? Doesn't Paul tell the Ephesian church, or concerning the elders, that the Holy Spirit made them elders? Whom the Holy Ghost has made you all to see as to feed the church of God.

I wouldn't say personally there was a procedure for becoming an elder. The thing to do is that the Holy Spirit has given you a burden for shepherding the flock. It is to shepherd the flock.

And the recognition will come, won't it? I would think, I don't know, but I would think behind the questions the thought may be that there are some that have felt that it would be the proper thing to vote in elders for the assembly to gather together, and then the assembly vote on who was going to be your elders. There's one sure thing, that that is completely unscriptural. The twenty other acts to which one has already made reference tell that take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you elders.

The usual procedure, now you ask for a scriptural procedure, and this is, I'm not quite sure what you have in mind, you know. In the early church there was a procedure, a scriptural procedure. The apostle, as an apostle, as an apostle, gave instructions.

He gave instructions, for instance, to Titus to go and make elders. So there was then, in that day, a scriptural making of an elder, a procedure for making of an elder. Titus would move in, and as a man of God, would notice men who had these qualifications and would point them out.

I don't believe we have apostles today. I believe the Holy Ghost points out men in a very real way, in a very practical way. But I do believe also that the principle that lies behind it is a real one.

In most assemblies there would be a company of elders. Maybe one of the brethren would leave the district, maybe one would pass away, maybe the meeting itself would grow to such an extent that there was a need for a larger number to do the work of elders. I believe that those elders themselves, they are qualified men, they are godly men, they are men with a knowledge of the Bible, they are the men most suitable to see others that have them.

And I believe that those elders, taking the example of Titus, pointing out men, naming elders, pointing them out, men that were able, I believe those elders would naturally, being the spiritual men of the assembly, be able to point out others that are spiritual to help in their work. We asked a question last week, and I'd just like to ask it again. Is there anything in Scripture to stop a concerned brother, an exercised brother, from doing the work that an elder does? There's a true saying, if any man desires or aspires to the work of a bishop, he aspires to a good work.

Now, here's a brother in the assembly, he aspires to this work within his own soul and before God, and he starts to do the work. Is there anything that would forbid him to do that? Would he be stepping on the toes of somebody? Would he be out of bounds? I would say most definitely not. There's nothing to stop a man doing the work of an overseer.

As long as he doesn't get puffed up, you remember the epistle of the Corinthians, fourth chapter, that you may not be puffed up. The difficulty is that there are so many folk who want the office of a bishop, but they don't want the work of a bishop. There's so many folk who like to be looked upon as one of the leaders of the fellowship, but it is, as John has so wonderfully pointed out, the work of a shepherd.

And if you know anything about sheep, and please, I come from the county where they grow sheep, and we've got sheep, not those old mummies of things you have on your way, but this I do know, that the work of a shepherd's hard work. It's all that you can rest assured. If it's pouring the rain, that's the time that you will drop our land.

If the snow's on the ground, that's the time that you could rest assured it'll be Sunday morning when you want to go to the meeting. So you will drop our land. You'll need to be going out there caring for the sheep in the most, I won't want to use the term, unearthly time.

If we're shepherds, whether it's going to cost us sleep, it's going to cost us time, it's going to cost us money, it's going to cost us work, it's going to cost. But it'll be worth it all when we say, well done. Well done.

So do the work, but don't get puffed up and tell that you want the office. Desire good work. Yes, and it isn't an office here, it is a good work, and I didn't have any thought in mind of some upstart coming along and saying, well, they're not doing it the way it should be done.

But there's many a burdened soul that feels maybe I'm not just up there, but there's nothing to stop it from quietly going on and encouraging and feeding and helping God's people. And when he does that, I'm thinking of a case right among ourselves. There's a young man, and he's, I say young because where I am, he's in his early 40s, and he's doing that work right along.

We're encouraging him. Now, how can you encourage? I think this was a good step forward. How can you encourage other brethren in connection with this work? You say that there are men that are passing off the scene, and men move away.

How do we, how is this replenished? You say the Holy Ghost makes it, but how is it done practically among ourselves? Do you know one of the first things? I think it's about time we started saying thank you. I think that's one of the first things. We are so apt to be critical when we think things are not going well, we're not apt to say thank you when things are going along nicely.

And I think there's nothing in the world that will encourage a brother like the realization that those that he's been seeking to help appreciate that he's seeking to help them. And I still think it's a good thing to see that. Read again.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. I know one assembly where the elders meet with a group of young men regularly, once a month or every two months, it just depends. And they're not training them to be elders.

You can't do that. But they're trying to encourage them. And then if the encouragement works out so that they aspire to this work and they get involved in it, then they would be invited later on.

But the idea is to try and encourage them by working together of the young and the old. And, brethren and sisters, let's stop this division. Let's stop this separation between young and old.

Like in the days of Josiah, the old and the young were working together. The young king and the older men, they worked together. That's why they had times of great blessing.

I think that we should be a great encouragement to the young men, and they should desire, they should be willing, they should want to come to those who are older because of our attitude toward them. Isn't this what Paul did? You know, you read in Acts chapter 20 that there accompanied him into Asia. Yes.

So Pater of the Rhea, and of the Thessalonians Aristarchus and Secundus, and Gaius of Derbe and Timotheus, and of Asia Tychicus and Trophimus, he had a whole bunch of satellites revolving around him in orbit where he went. And he used these young men. He sent them on his errands.

He entrusted them with tasks under his supervision. And he was always attracting young men to himself and training them, discipling them, teaching them, living the life before him. I think it's very interesting, that connection that... Timothy is a very interesting case.

He was with Paul Radeloff in Acts 16. He was well-reported out by the brethren in two localities. He had already been doing a work for God.

Paul said, I want him. He took him with him. I like Paul's testimony to Timothy later on.

Actually accompanied with him for a while. Had done these errands. Had been serving the Lord.

You remember what he said in Philippians 2? I have no man like-minded who will naturally care for your state. All men seek their own. Not Timothy.

He seeks the things of Jesus Christ. Now, this is what happens when an older man and a younger man can work together in the things of God. And it does not always depend on the young man.

Sometimes the older man is not steadfast. He's stuck fast. And there's no yielding at all.

But I think, after people have said all they want about the Apostle Paul, I think he was a gracious man. I think he was kindly. And he encouraged Timothy in a wonderful, wonderful way.

I would like that testimony to be said of me. I have no man like-minded, and this is the work of a shepherd, who will naturally care for your state. Yours is a treasure.

Well, I was trying to just pass a little observation that so often is passed, but I think it's a very good one. And don't let also forget that in the Church of God, if it's a flock, the sheep and the lambs feed together. There is a great tendency in the world today for this age gap to work even in the ephedra.

I saw, like you mentioned it, because you don't know the fellowship, but I was in a fellowship in Australia where there were two fellowships in the one hall. I spoke a great deal about it. I couldn't help it.

And I went on the young folks, and there were two fellowships in one hall. The only time they met was at the breaking of prayer. The young people had their own Bible reading.

Ah, yes, well, you see, young folks like to put it in a different way than the old folks, so they had a young people's Bible reading. Young people had a prayer meeting. Young people had a gospel meeting.

You know, they called it an answer church rally. And the older folk, they came out to the conversational Bible reading and the ministry meeting. And there are lots of things to be said.

Oh, there's so much study to do. They can't get out in the evenings. They just gather at times when they can.

But there is, in that particular building, two fellowships, and I think that's utterly wrong. But there must be the giving for the elders. If our meetings are at a time that young people can't get at, well, then we've got to sit down and say, maybe our time could be changed a little.

If our ministry is such that young folks somehow just don't get anything, well, we've got to sit down. You're shepherds, brethren. You're shepherds.

I said this in the week, and I'd like to repeat it, and then be quiet. I was speaking in Elphicute. I'd been waxing very eloquent on the responsibility of the elders to lead the flock.

I'd been preaching on the 144th psalm, my favorite psalm, that your garners may be full, a forty-more manner of store. Oh, dear me, I wax eloquent. Wham, wham.

And I was walking up over the hill with a dear old elder, Mr. Stephen. He put his arm on my shoulder, and he said, Bernard Porter, I know, I know we've a responsibility to feed the sheep. But what do you do when the sheep don't want to be fed? So, don't let's forget there are two sides to it.

There's not only the elder's side, there's the flock's side. And if the food's available, well, let's eat it. Our time is almost gone.

Is there someone that would like to raise a question or comment from the floor? Any further? Yes. I'd like to ask Brother Porter, you mentioned what your answer would be in marrying two unfaithful people. I told you we were going to ask that.

But then I was interested in your comment, or your emphasis on the fact that those are two unsaved and not unequally killed. And my question was, what would your answer be if they were unequally killed? I would thank God that I'm not an elder, and that I would pass it over to the elderly. Sir, you cannot get off that easy.

What would you do? Yes, I can't get off that very easy because of this leg, see, that's why. In my country, in England, not Scotland, but in England, it isn't the man who's registered, it's the building that's registered. I could stop a road sweeper and bring him in to marry me.

Any person could come in and marry another person. It's the building that's registered. Well, I can't doubt you, you see, because I'd like to say I'd be prepared to marry you, but the elder said we don't have that wedding in this place.

So it's their responsibility. But sir, you are an elder, and you're not going to step on my foot.

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