

# Seek The Old Paths

*"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."*

(Jeremiah 6:16)

Vol. 7, No. 2

February 1996

## Contend For The Faith!

Wade Lee Webster

Jude wrote, *"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Jude 3-4).

Jude saw the need to write the brethren and to exhort them to *"earnestly contend for the faith"* because of false teachers that had *"crept in unawares."* Jude could write this same letter to any host of congregations today. Let's notice three things these verses teach the Christian about **"contending for the faith."**

First, we see the **MANNER** in which we are to contend. Jude said we are to *earnestly contend*. The phrase *"earnestly contend"* is literally "to wrestle, strive, or agonize." The secular writers used these words to describe the intense effort that the athletes put forth to win the Grecian games of the first century. Paul, in comparing the Christian life to a race, used similar terminology (1 Cor. 9:24-25). Likewise, the phrase *"earnestly contend"* describes the intense efforts which are to characterize the faithful as they stand for the truth. We cannot give a half-hearted stand for truth and fulfill this command.

The Lord has never been satis-

fied with those who are trying to remain in the middle between what's right and what's wrong. He condemned the Laodiceans for their lukewarmness and the congregations of Pergamos and Thyatira because they failed to stand against the false teachers that were among them (Rev. 3:14-16; 2:12-15,20). We must never be *"ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16).

Second, we see the **MESSAGE** for which we are to contend. Jude said that we are to earnestly contend for *"the faith."* The phrase *"the faith"* stands for the system of faith that we have revealed for us in the New Testament. For example, in the book of Galatians we read concerning Paul, *"But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed"* (Gal. 1:23). Also, in the book of Acts we read that *"a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith"* (Acts 6:7).

As Christians, we are not to contend for just any religious doctrine, but, rather, we are to contend for what the New Testament teaches.

Third, we see the **MEN** with whom we are to contend. Jude wrote, *"For there are certain men crept in unawares..."* (Jude 4). Here, Jude told the brethren the men against whom they were to contend for the faith — false teachers. These false teachers were trying to turn *"the grace of our God into lasciviousness."* Jude wanted the brethren to


stand up for the truth, which included standing against these false teachers.

After warning the brethren of the presence of the false teachers, Jude begins a lengthy description of the false teachers to **help** the brethren to be able to detect them (vs.8-16). Jude wanted these brethren to have the attitude that Paul expressed in the book of Galatians. Paul wrote, *"And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you"* (Gal. 2:4-5).

We are not to harbor false teachers but rather to mark and avoid them (Rom. 6:17-18). False teachers may appear to be the ministers of righteousness, but they are in reality the ministers of Satan (2 Cor. 11:15). We must not support them in any way lest we become partakers of their evil deeds and suffer with them in their condemnation (2 John 9-11).

Jude wrote the brethren to teach them the **manner** in which they were to contend, the **message** for which they were to contend, and the **men** against whom they were to contend. May we also heed Jude's words and stand against the false teachers of our day who are making "havoc of the church."

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Editorial...

# IF, THEN, On Women Interpreters

Garland M. Robinson

All who believe that only that which is authorized is acceptable to God, and who believe that only the revelation of God authorizes, view the "IF" "THEN" line of reasoning irrefutable when the IF proposition is correct and the THEN conclusion is logically connected. In view of this, please consider the following.

What teaching or practice was forbidden (not authorized) in the first century by the New Testament, but is permissible (authorized) today? Can you think of any teaching that was wrong then but is not wrong now? Can you think of any practice that was wrong then but is not wrong now? IF it was a sin in the early church, THEN it is a sin now. If there were doctrines and practices which were wrong in the first century but are permissible now, then where is the revelation that authorizes such doctrines and practices?

IF it was a sin in the first century to steal (Eph. 4:28), THEN it is a sin today.

IF it was a sin to be a drunkard in the first century (Gal. 5:21), THEN it is a sin today.

IF adultery was a sin in the early church (1 Cor. 6:9-11), THEN adultery is a sin today.

IF instrumental music was a sin in the first century (Eph. 5:19), THEN it is a sin today.

These "IF THEN" statements hold true with every sin mentioned in the many lists found throughout the New Testament (Rom. 1:21-32; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Tim. 3:1-7).

Notice how this same principle holds true in regards to the role of women in the church.

IF it was a sin in the first century for a woman to preach (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-12), THEN it is

a sin today.

IF it was a sin in the first century for a woman to lead prayer in the presence of men (1 Tim. 2:8), THEN it is a sin today.

IF it was a sin for a woman to wait on the Lord's table in the first century church (1 Tim. 2:11-12), THEN it is a sin today.

IF it was a sin in the first century worship assembly for a woman to speak as an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:34-35), THEN it is wrong in the twentieth century.

IF it was a sin in the first century worship assembly for a woman to function in any capacity which caused her to have authority over men (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-12), THEN it is a sin today.

Some are arguing "1 Corinthians 14 doesn't count" in order to circumvent the plain teaching that a woman must remain silent in regards to "exercising authority over men in a worship assembly" (1 Cor. 14:34-35). It is claimed we cannot use 1 Cor. 14:34-35 today because it does not apply to us; i.e., that we cannot use any passage in regards to an assembly wherein miraculous gifts were being exercised. Their conclusion is that since we do not have miraculous gifts today, then whatever was said to those brethren in that first century assembly does not apply to us. But let's see if this is consistent with the text?

1 Corinthians 14:5 clearly shows that the church is edified WHEN the audience understands the Word that is preached. With a foreign language speaker, the Word is not understood unless it is interpreted! IF the message is not interpreted, THEN the church is not edified. IF the message is interpreted, THEN the church is edified. There was no understanding and there-

fore no edification without the message being interpreted. The interpreter was obviously involved in the process of the church being edified, for without that person, the word that was preached was spoken into the "air" (v.9). "And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped" (v.7)?

IF one does not understand what is spoken, THEN he is a barbarian (foreigner) to the one who speaks (v.11).

IF a woman could not serve as an interpreter in the worship assembly of 1 Corinthians 14, THEN how can she function as an interpreter in the worship assembly today? By the common practice of those who use women to interpret today, it is implied that a woman could also function as an interpreter in the first century church PROVIDED she exercised no spiritual gift in the process. In other words, she could not interpret in the first century if she did so by inspiration; but, IF she was not inspired, THEN she could function as an interpreter. This is nonsensical! If anything, the opposite would be true. By inspiration, she would be able to function perfectly in the capacity as an interpreter. There would be absolutely no danger of her making a mistake or going beyond what was spoken by the man by either adding to or taking from what he said. By being inspired, she would be guaranteed that her interpreting would be exactly what the man said, no more and no less; and, therefore, in accordance with God's Will.

IF it can be explained to the audience today (as many say they are doing) that a woman interpreter is not exercising authority over men, that she is simply a mouthpiece or expedient, THEN surely it could have been explained to the audience in the first century that a woman was not exercising authority over men! IF it can be done today, THEN it could have been done in the first century.

Notice also: IF men could not speak unless they took turns in the first century (1 Cor. 14:27), THEN

they cannot speak in the church today unless they take turns. There would be nothing but confusion if we all were to speak at the same time!

Some conclude that because a miraculous element was involved in the assembly of 1 Cor. 14, that the regulations governing that assembly do not apply today. IF those regulations (restrictions) do not apply today, THEN men in our assemblies can speak without taking turns! If not, why not? Consider also, were the men of 1 Cor. 14:27 inspired when they spoke? The answer is yes! IF it only applied to them while they were inspired, THEN it does not apply when they were not inspired. IF it does not apply when they were not inspired, THEN they could all speak at the same time! Therefore, they could all speak at the same time THEN, IF they were uninspired, just like men today can all speak at the same time because we are uninspired! That also is nonsensical and causes an assembly of great confusion.

Any man who spoke in a "tongue" (foreign language) was forbidden to speak, i.e., "keep silence in the church" (1 Cor. 14:28), when no interpreter was present to translate what he said. The word "silence" here is the same word translated "hold his peace" in verse 30 and "silence" in verse 34 when it is said that women must "keep silence in the churches." What these verses say to one (the women), they say to the other (the men). Whatever restrictions were bound upon the one, were bound upon the other. IF the women had to keep silence in the church (v.34), THEN the men had to keep silence in the church (v.28). However, it is clear from the context that the men had to keep silence with respect to a certain condition; i.e., they were to keep silence only when there was no interpreter present to translate what they said. But, no such "exception" was placed upon the women. They were to keep silence period!

But, in what respect were they (i.e., men speaking with no interpreter and women in general) to keep silent? Was it a blanket silence? Could these men and

women lift up their voices in song with the congregation? Certainly they could (Eph. 5:19). Could they speak a word to correct or tend to their children that sat by their side (Eph. 6:4)? Certainly. Could they cough if they had to (a cough is not silence!)? In what respect then — in what regard — were they each to keep silent? The silence imposed upon them was in respect to the public teaching of God's Word! Neither one of them (men or women) could participate in instructing the audience in the Word of God while bound under "silence." IF the "silence" of verse 34 forbade a woman to sing with the congregation, THEN it forbade the men of verse 28 to sing with the congregation. But who believes such? Not I.

Could we use a chain of interpreters? Would it be permissible to have one male speaker and two, three, four or more interpreters? This is a real situation in an audience with multiple languages spoken. Could these two, three, four or more interpreters be women? Who in the audience would believe that these women were not preaching and/or exercising a major part in that assembly?

According to 1 Corinthians 14:40, "all things were to be done decently and in order." But IF the limitations or restrictions mentioned in this chapter only applied

to that assembly because of the presence of miracles, THEN this verse does not apply today. But who would conclude that we are not bound by the regulation of this verse? Do not we all appeal to this verse to show that our worship assemblies must be conducted decently and in order? Yea, verily!

Whatever was a sin in the first century church is a sin today.

## 10th Annual Northwest Lectureship

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**JEROME Church of Christ**

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# WARNINGS

Wayne Cox

**W**arn: "to inform plainly and strongly of possible trouble" (*The Random House College Dictionary*, c. 1982, p. 1483).

For both young and old alike, warnings are a part of our lives each day. Children are warned not to play in the street, not to touch the hot stove, and not to take candy from strangers. Teenagers and adults are warned about alcohol and drug abuse and the evils of associating with the wrong crowd. The surgeon general warns that cigarette smoking may be hazardous to one's health; recent reports reveal that second-hand smoke is also detrimental. The television "beeps" and tells us of a winter storm warning, severe thunderstorm warning or tornado warning. If one breaks the speed limit, he may be fortunate enough just to get a warning rather than a citation. Although we sometimes regard warnings as a bother, annoyance, nuisance, etc., they serve to help us avoid danger — they are for our own welfare.

Warnings are prevalent throughout Scripture, and they too serve a vital purpose. God's commandments and judgments were created for warning: "*The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether...Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward*" (Psalm 19:9,11). The word "warn" and its derivatives occur some twenty-nine times in the King James Version in both Old and New Testaments. For instance:

*"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me"* (Ezek. 3:17).

*"Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears"* (Acts 20:31).

Paul not only warned the elders

at Ephesus, he also warned the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:14), the unruly (1 Thess. 5:14), and every man in general (Col. 1:28). Paul's threefold charge to young Timothy was "*reprove, rebuke, and exhort*" [i.e. warn] (2 Tim. 4:2), since the day was coming when so many would not endure the proclamation of sound doctrine, but would choose rather to hear ear-tickling, back-slapping sophistry which would save no one.

Just as there was a place in preaching for warning in the first century, there is also in the twentieth! In fact, we cannot preach the "*whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27) if we refrain from giving needed admonitions and words of caution. What are some things about which Christians should warn people?

## SATAN

*"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Peter 5:8).

Although some deny the existence of Satan, he is alive and well on planet earth! The Bible describes the devil in various ways:

- (1) He is a murderer: "*He was a murderer from the beginning*" (John 8:44).
- (2) He is a liar: "*When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it*" (John 8:44).
- (3) He is a deceiver: he "*deceiveth the whole world*" (Rev. 12:9); Paul warned of his ability to transform himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).
- (4) He is the tempter: "*And when the tempter came to him*" (Matt. 4:3).

From the above descriptions of Satan, it is readily apparent that he does not seek our best interests. He is our number one enemy, and is relentless in his pursuit of trying to bring about our ruin and spiritual destruction. Therefore, heed the

warning and resist him (James 4:7)!

## SIN

Scripture classifies the following as sin:

- (1) Violating one's conscience (Rom. 14:13).
- (2) Knowing to do good and not doing it (James 4:17).
- (3) Breaking God's law (1 John 3:4).
- (4) Failing to keep God's commands (1 John 5:17).

Sin is inseparably linked to Satan's work of temptation: "*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*" (James 1:14-15). The tempter is adept at his work in seducing man — a fact with which we are all too familiar, for "*all have sinned*" (Rom. 3:23).

We should send forth a "red alert" against all the manifold sins of our day, such as immorality, fornication, hatred, bitterness, strife, envy, lying, immodesty, drunkenness, et al. May we never be guilty of minimizing sin by referring to it as "immature development", "negative goodness", "misdirection", or a "mere mistake." Lust is not love; pornography is not art; dishonesty is not shrewdness; and homosexuality is not a biological maladjustment. Friends, whitewashing sin does not change it from what it really is! The world in general and the church in particular need a good dose of strong Bible preaching against such specific sins to produce conversion and to prevent apostasy. Let us be courageous in both defending and living the truth and denying sin's place in our lives. Heed the warning and flee sin (1 Cor. 6:18)!

## SIN'S CONSEQUENCES

People often minimize the consequences of sin by saying: "It will all

come out in the wash"; "One hundred years from now it will be forgotten"; "He's just sowing his wild oats"; or "Boys will be boys." How foolish to belittle the disastrous effects of sin!

What are the tragic consequences of sin? *"The wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23). *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption..."* (Gal. 6:7-8). God's law of sowing and reaping is as old as time. The law holds true in the physical realm as well as in the spiritual. One cannot sow wild oats and pray for a crop failure — he must face the consequences!

Many times, sin's effects are felt in this life. For instance, the drunkard may die in an automobile accident or with cirrhosis of the liver as a direct result of his sin of drinking. Hospitals are filled with those suffering the ravages of AIDS as a consequence of their immorality.

Every time, sin's effects are felt in the next life unless they are repented of, for hell is the eternal consequence of unrepentant sin! As one has said, "Sin is the only thing that will keep you out of heaven; it is the only thing that will put you in hell. Indeed, sin is a three-letter word which begins the longest sentence." In view of such, we cannot afford to ignore sin's consequences. Yet the majority of mankind does just that!

In May of 1953 a tornado struck the city of Waco, Texas. The twister left 114 dead, 600 injured, and 52 million dollars in property damage. However, the death toll could have been minimal since the weather bureau gave ample warning. One woman said, "I heard the warning, but never thought it would really happen." Myriads today reflect that same disposition toward God's warning — *"Prepare to meet me in obedience, or be cast into eternal torment."* No doubt, many will one day say that they too heard the warning, but never really believed that God would send men to hell. Heed the warning! Obey God today through gospel obedience; remain faithful to Him always!

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## Elders COLUMN

# The Responsibility of the Congregation to the Elders

James W. Boyd

*Peace, progress, and faithfulness of a congregation depends on members doing their duty to the elders as well as elders doing their duty to the church.*

**T**he church was established and organized by Christ. All information we have about the way the church is supposed to be is found in the New Testament. Christ is the head of the church and has preeminence in all things to the church (Col. 1:18). The system of government is relatively simple and efficient when men follow the Lord's plan. We read of there being elders in every church (Acts 14:23) as was true in Philippi (Phil. 1:1). The congregations were overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and every Christian a part of the church, being members of the body (1 Cor. 12:27). This is the New Testament pattern for the government of the local congregation under the headship of Christ and the authority granted by Him to the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, their teaching being now embodied in the inspired, authoritative, all-sufficient, infallible, and inerrant Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Those who serve in the capacity of elders and deacons are to be men of certain specified qualifications which are revealed in First Timothy chapter three and Titus chapter one.

Elders have duties both to God and to the congregation they oversee. There are various terms in the New Testament that denote them and their work, such as pastor, shepherd, elder, bishop, presbyter and overseer. Their duties we have dis-

cussed in the last two months' issues. The congregation also has responsibilities to those who serve as elders. Serving as an elder and being a part of the eldership (the plurality of men who jointly oversee the congregation) is one of the most awesome and sobering duties that a human being can undertake. We must respect the magnitude of this work. We could only wish that all who are elders realized its significance, and many do. We could wish that all members considered it as they ought. The Bible teaches that the elders shall give an account (Heb. 13:17). The work of an elder is a work to be done and Scripture calls it a good work (1 Tim. 3:1). But just as elders are to assume and discharge this work, the congregation is also to meet responsibilities to them because each Christian shall give account of himself regarding these duties as well as all of life (Rom. 14:12; 1 Cor. 5:10).

### DOUBLE HONOR

First Timothy 5:17,18, *"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith. Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, a laborer is worthy of his reward."* Elders are to be held with honor, even double honor. They not only should receive moral and spiritual support and esteem, but

also supplied with physical and material support if needed as they do their work. If they are so provided, even as an ox is not to be denied the fruit of its labor, then elders would be allowed more time to devote their energies for the performance of their duties, especially the duty of attending to matters of doctrine and the word. We sometimes forget that those who are elders usually have all of the individual and family duties that others have plus the duties of being an elder. They must provide a livelihood for themselves and their families as do others but also expend much time and work in caring for the congregation in all the ways they are obligated. While they deserve the respect and moral support when they serve well, they ought not be forced to neglect any of this work because they have to expend themselves in lesser duties. Whatever they need to discharge their work as elders ought to be provided by the congregation.

First Thessalonians 5:12,13, *"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."* To know them that labor means more than just knowing their names to identify them. I have found that many members of the local church to not even know who the men are who serve as elders of the congregation. This is a fault of members that can be easily erased. It may be that some elders are so inactive that nobody takes notice of them and the fault lies with them. But knowing them means to have knowledge that they occupy such a place and understand their work, and then give recognition that they are serving in this most serious duty, respecting the duty they perform. It means giving recognition that they serve the church, and then give recognition of the service rendered. It means they are accepted by the members of the congregation they oversee. The very work they do demands special recognition to be given them. It is wrong to ask a person to assume this work and appoint him to the work and then withhold from him what he needs, or not work with them cooperatively in carrying

out the work.

### ESTEEM IN LOVE

This same passage says to esteem them highly in love. This love is not favoritism, nor simply a sentimental feeling toward them. This does not have reference to a personal affection, although that might be included. Many members really have an affection for the good men that lead them in spiritual pathways. It is rather a love that seeks the elder's highest good, a love of him and for him and his wife because of the sacred work he is performing for the whole congregation, done on behalf of others, and by the authority of Christ. This love must express itself in deeds as well as words. It calls for being helpful, responsive, cooperative, respectful, ready to carry out assignments, helping them carry out their duties. God expects members to help, not hinder. When the eldership is not running smoothly, it possibly is due to friction among them, but it is also often due to the lack of cooperation by members. We have heard brethren speak of how they love their elders, but they do not lift their hand to assist them in expediting the work the congregation undertakes. Love for the eldership stems from love for the work overall, and respect for the work for God that elders do.

### SLOW TO ACCUSE

First Timothy 5:19, *"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses."* It is generally open season on preachers and elders, or anyone who tackles a task. Some people seem to think they have some God-given right to take potshots at whoever serves publicly, whenever they want to shoot, and never feel obligated to know much about what they are attacking. I read a little statement recently that said some folks leave "no turn unstoned." You read it correctly. Regardless of the turn made, some will stone it. Such is often the burden of serving as an elder. Many good men have been hurt and their lives made painful because some careless member or members assume the right to "dig" and "jab"

at them because they are elders.

Those who go to the front lines and into the foreground of the work, as leaders must do, are often targets of criticism. Often this criticism is done in love and done constructively. But too often it is done with malice by those who much prefer to talk against rather than walk and work with the ones they criticize. They prefer to use cutting words rather than engage in constructive work. They undermine with their talking. They do not seem to consider how they undercut authority even in the minds of the young and those outside the church. I have heard members severely berate preachers and elders in the presence of young people and non-Christians. When such is done, should we be surprised that the young and non-Christians have no respect for the church?

Elders are not perfect in all they do. But are we? Elders are subject to making mistakes, and their mistakes are more serious. They are subject to temptations as others. Yes, they should be better able to handle it because they are to be selected from the strong. But they are still just human beings and suffer from pressures as do others. This is one reason we believe God authorized a plurality of elders to form the eldership that oversees the congregation rather than having a one man rule. It is not likely, although possible, that all the eldership will "go bananas" at the same time. Brethren ought not be too quick to assume elders are at fault unless there is verified testimony to that fact by witnesses. Criticisms are often made from evil motives and are not Just. When they are Just and proven, Paul says, *"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may fear"* (1 Tim. 5:20). This would apply to elders as well as everyone else. But this is something that must be done cautiously.

Failure to treat an elder or the eldership properly and Justly and accepting whatever somebody says against them is to do wrong. When differences arise with elders, they should be the first to know of it. Why tell everyone else? Preachers often make this mistake and stir up rebellion against elders before they confront the elders with their differences. It is not unknown for elders to



be viciously criticized and no effort made to either prove or correct the mistakes that are alleged. Preachers have certainly been treated this way also. Such has been the cause of many disturbances in the church. For shame!

### **GOLDEN RULE**

How is the member to treat the elder? Let us begin with Matthew 7:12, called the "golden rule." Sometimes we wonder whatever happened to the "golden rule" among some brethren, seeing how they fight, claw, and rip each other. It should be applied in every relationship including treatment toward elders. Would you like your sincere efforts to be belittled, ridiculed, your motives harshly judged and impugned, your earnest desire to serve and do right to be scoffed and mocked? Would you want your family to be berated and accused unjustly as the topic of talk, talk, talk? Do you not realize that being in the spotlight, as all leaders are, is difficult enough without someone hiding in the darkness trying to shoot you down? Many problems in the home and church would never have the air to survive if brethren believed and obeyed Matthew 7:12. We could possibly emphasize this passage in application of treatment toward elders to the extent that would conclude that this covers just about everything about the duty of the congregation toward elders.

### **SUBMISSION AND OBEDIENCE**

Hebrews 13:1,17, "*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.*" We are to be mindful and thoughtful of the elders, especially regarding our deeds and attitudes toward them and the manner of life we live. We owe it to them to make their labor as painless and successful as we can make it. Consideration for their feelings is proper. We must be attentive

to them, giving heed to their lead. We have the duty to imitate their faith, like Paul called upon brethren to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

To obey is to submit to their rule. They make decisions of Judgment on behalf of the local body. This is part of their work. We should cooperate as best we can with those decisions. We should not cause the faithful elder grief as he does his work, but be a source of joy to him. Otherwise, it is unprofitable for us. We have known some brethren who have been constant burdens to the eldership throughout their lives. They are always a source of problems and antagonisms by the way they complain, obstruct, or the lives they live.

Leaders cannot lead if followers will not follow. Since God expects leaders to lead, isn't it true that He expects followers to follow? Elders rule and the congregation should obey and follow. Elders are to feed the church and the congregation should be willing to be fed and cultivate an appetite for the sincere milk of the word. The food is the meat of the truth, the milk of the gospel. Members should take advantage of the opportunities the elders provide to be fed.

Elderships have authority, a delegated authority, to discharge their duties. They have a limited authority, having no power to make, alter, legislate, or compromise truth. They do have the authority to see to it that the word of truth is taught, defended, upheld, and enforced with the work of the church, the pillar and ground of the truth, being expedited. Members should cooperate with them in seeing all of this is accomplished.

### **HOLD UP THEIR HANDS**

Members are expected to be as Aaron and Hur when the Amalekites attacked Israel in the wilderness. They held up the hands of Moses so the battle led by Joshua could be brought to a successful conclusion. As Moses held up the rod of God, Israel prevailed. When he became weary and the rod was lowered, Israel suffered setbacks. So Aaron and Hur held up his hands and the victory belonged to all the

people of God.

We realize surely, if the elders go contrary to truth, we shall not follow men, but God. As in all matters of authority, in the home, parental, in civil government, husbands, etc. "*...we must obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29). But in the matters of opinion and human judgment that affect the local church, elders have the duty to lead and members have the duty to follow. To refuse to do so is to challenge God's government for the church. It is to dishonor the very ones we are commanded to honor. In the many years I have been preaching (nearly forty-three at this writing) I have never knowingly taken problems with elders (and I have had them) before the congregation to do battle without first facing them, even in matters of doctrine as well as opinion. In matters of opinion wherein we differed I just let it pass, and sometimes it cost me dearly because some elders would not be as considerate. In matters of doctrine I still showed respect for them first. I find this is generally the case with most preachers and members who take their faith and work seriously. Only in matters of "*thus saith the Lord*" is one justified in contending openly and then because God's truth is challenged.

We can summarize the responsibility of the members to the elders by saying it is to love, support, imitate, obey, submit, honor, cooperate, and treat according to the "golden rule," living so as to add no burden but bring joy to them. Peace, progress, and faithfulness of a congregation depends on members doing their duty to the elders as well as elders doing their duty to the church. After all, we are brothers and sisters in Christ who serve in different capacities, but each doing whatever he can to see that others get to heaven.

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