

# On Elders and Preachers

**Dub McClish**

Much could and should be said on what preachers owe elders. Many sad problems have been precipitated by unfaithful, unappreciative, and sometimes unscrupulous preachers. Such men give every faithful and hard-working preacher a bad name. However, more and more problems are occurring in congregations of the Lord's people because of elders who are more like wolves than the shepherds they are supposed to be. While freely admitting that preachers sometimes cause problems for good elders, it does not change the fact that many good men (and their families), and the Truth they are determined to preach, are made to suffer because of weak and carnal elders. Study with me some matters pertaining to this subject.

Elders have the responsibility of obeying and submitting to the Word of God as the preacher faithfully preaches it, no less than any other Christian. Preachers are to be "obeyed" not because they are preachers, but because they preach the Word of God: "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority" (Tit. 2:15). This authority is not that of the messenger himself, but of the Message, which is of God (1 The. 2:13). Many churches are presently suffering grievous problems (and others will yet suffer them) because of elders who will not tolerate the authority of God's Word on certain points, either because of their own sins or because of the sins of others who murmur at the Truth. Other elders have become so spineless that they do not want even the portions of Truth they still agree with preached authoritatively.

I once worked with a congregation for more than six years, during which all previous records were multiplied, a building addition costing \$135,000 was paid for in cash, five additional acres were purchased, a monthly evangelistic paper was being published and mailed to every address (6,000+) in the county and a daily live 15-minute radio program was being produced and aired. My work had been characterized by great peace and good will with the elders so far as I knew. However, when a small number of members (I was once told about 10 families out of 600 members) decided the sermons were "negative" and "offensive," not full of enough "grace" and "love" and "didn't make people feel good about themselves," they applied just the right kind of pressure on the right elder, resulting in my being asked to resign "for the good of the church." Never mind that the church had made wonderful progress under that old "negative," "loveless" preaching! It was so much in the "best interest" of the church that it almost tore the church apart and more were lost by the turmoil than the number who were after my scalp. It will take several years and not a few funerals to overcome the damage to the church

itself, to say nothing of the fact that the Lord's church was made a laughingstock before the community.

Elders owe preachers their defense against idle criticism and accusations. Every preacher who stands for anything and preaches with any degree of force will stir some complaint, murmuring, and criticism—usually from the weakest members. Social drinkers, summer strippers, night club hoppers, adulterers and fornicators, gossipers, the covetous, the liberals, the antis, the premillennialists, et al., do not like the Truth proclaimed on their pet vices or hobbies. When they are preached on, one can depend on them to complain. There is no way a preacher can survive the effect of such termites of his work and influence unless godly saints, especially elders, defend him as he preaches the Truth. Elders are both cowardly and foolish who will allow their preacher to be criticized for doing his job and do nothing about it. To listen to such without rebuke of the critic is to ask for big trouble, which will surely come.

Elders are wise who realize that (as earlier mentioned) it is not the messenger, but the Message, that is under attack in such cases. If the preacher is preaching the Truth, they must defend him or they will answer to God for not doing so. If he is not preaching the Truth, they should insist that he do so. If he refuses, they should send him on his way and get someone who will preach “the whole counsel of God.” (Incidentally, it is extreme dereliction of duty to give a glowing recommendation to a compromising preacher to hasten his departure, thus encouraging other unsuspecting brethren to hire him and his problems. It is hardly more honorable to highly recommend a faithful preacher whom they have fired, so as to hasten his departure.)

Ironically and lamentably, it is more often the preacher who dares to preach all of the Truth, rather than the one who fails to do so, who is being fired nowadays. Elders need to dust off Paul's charge to them to “convict the gainsayers” and “stop the mouths of unruly men and vain talkers” (Tit. 1:9–10). Instead, what we are often seeing is elders who cower to the pressures of spiritual pygmies in the church and who are quick to apologize when the Truth is distinctively preached. When even one elder begins listening to the critics of the Truth, control is usually lost to the critics. Both the Gospel Message and he who preaches it are placed in a “no-win” posture. It matters not that a decided majority of members may appreciate the faithful preacher and the sound doctrine he preaches. Such (who are usually the “silent majority”) are run over “roughshod” by elders who operate more on political pressure than on pure principle.

This is surely a prime example of “lording it over” the church, so plainly prohibited by Peter (1 Pet. 5:3).

In such cases the devil has triumphed, the Truth has been ground into the dirt and the preacher has been made the scapegoat and the fall guy for problems that never should have been allowed to develop. Why cannot elders summon the courage to tell complainers against the faithful preacher (really against God and His Word) that the Truth is being preached and will continue to be preached, and the gainsayer can either submit his will to it or move on, with the encouragement of the elders? If a preacher is living and preaching the Truth, elders must answer at the Judgment for their failure to defend his life and work so that the Truth may continue to prevail!

More and more “signs of the times” seem to be instructing us that the time may not be too far off when those of us who are determined not to compromise the Gospel will find ourselves preaching in school buildings or other rented halls and supporting ourselves as we labor to continue the restoration of the New Testament church. While rejecting the “Elijah complex,” still it is a fair assessment of conditions among us to say that not a few preachers, elderships, and congregations no longer count the restoration and pattern principle valid. The tolerance level for the fullness of the Gospel is rapidly diminishing. The “concordance” preacher is rapidly being cast aside as a worn-out anachronism in favor of the spiffy-jiffy, namby-pamby storyteller. The demand is increasingly seen for a man in the pulpit who can entertain and keep the congregation at peace—who cares whether he knows and stands for the Truth?

Do elders have a right to hire a preacher? Absolutely! But they will give account for hiring and keeping the wrong kind—one who will not live by the Gospel or will not preach all of it, or both. Do elders have the right to fire a preacher? Absolutely! But, likewise, it had better be for the right reasons, or, more precisely, not for the wrong reasons. I shudder to think of the fate of the men at the judgment who cared so little for the eternal Truth of God's Word that they would bow to pressure from worldly, unbelieving brethren and fire a man because he dared be true to God!

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