

Recovering a Lost Doctrine

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 9

Paul writes this to Titus:

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you — if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife... (Titus 1:5-6 ESV)

Paul was interested in the subject of elders. Luke tells us of the great event in Acts 20 when Paul met with the Ephesian elders and gave them a sermon. He would have loved to be your speaker on this website, but he could not be here. But he did something better – Paul wrote letters. They were part of his strategy for instructing the churches he started. These letters have permanence with us today. They are divinely inspired letters and can instruct us in how we are to govern ourselves as the Church. Eldership is part of the NT instruction for a church, and a church without qualified elders is deficient.

Introduction

A. The Problem: The Loss of the New Testament Teaching on Eldership

1. First, let me share with you the burden that God placed on my heart about 40 years ago. It is still a fire that continues in my heart.
 - a) Around 1970 I became aware of the utter confusion over the doctrine of elders and deacons. I was disturbed by the disregard for the biblical claims regarding these offices.
 - b) While in seminary, I found that the professor of church polity was unable to support the practice of clerical orders with Scripture. After one class, I asked the professor: What about all the Scripture texts on the plurality of elders? The professor said that these texts meant nothing. I wasn't able to answer back to him, but I left with a lingering doubt: What about all the non-existing texts on the reverend clergymen?
2. Several years later, as I prepared a series of sermons on the doctrine of the Church, I was shocked to find that there were no books on elders from a biblical, expositional point of view and to realize that the books on deacons were nearly worthless.
 - a) They didn't interact with Scripture or expound Scripture at all. All I found were some booklets and tracts that explained specific denominational practices.

- b) This ignited a fire in my heart to write on this subject from an expositional viewpoint and let the Scriptures do the explaining. I wanted the book to expound every passage on elders, honestly and accurately. I decided I would willingly follow wherever the evidence led.
 - c) This resulted in the book *Biblical Eldership*. It is a Bible exposition on this subject.
3. Many churches have some form of eldership. They believe in eldership because it is in the Bible.
- a) But they don't have pastoral eldership, or Biblical Eldership. They have eldership, but not authentic New Testament eldership.
 - b) Their concept of eldership is what we call "board eldership." Elders are temporary advisors, administrators, finance men, policy makers, and fund raisers. These views are at odds with the New Testament concept of eldership.
 - c) Biblical Eldership is pastoral eldership, with qualified, functioning elders.

B. The Solution: Return to New Testament Teaching – Restoration, Recovery and Reformation

1. What we need is a fresh recovery of the New Testament, Christian teaching on eldership.
2. It should not surprise us that we have to recover a lost doctrine.
 - a) History (including the entire Old Testament story) shows that every doctrine has been subject to loss and confusion, and has had a need for restoration and clarification. (Note Gal. 1:6. Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 15:11.)
 - b) We see this cycle throughout the Old Testament. The people of God lost the Law of Moses! Israel drifts away from God and into idolatry.

C. Reformation, restoration, and revival are continuous works in the church.

1. Doctrines are lost or distorted and need restoration.
 - a) We see this in the New Testament with the seven churches in Revelation.
 - b) Think of the 16th century Reformation. The gospel had to be brought back to life! Scriptures had to be returned to a place of authority.
 - c) Reformation is a part of the normal process in the history of God's people. We should not be surprised by this.
 - d) I am calling for reformation and revival of a doctrine that has been lost, distorted, and confused.
2. Some powerful quotations regarding the need for continual reformation of church doctrine and life:
 - a) *"In every generation, we need an enlightened purification of our traditions." (S. Lewis Johnson, former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary)*

- b) The cry of the 17th century teachers and reformers was “Semper Reformanda:” always being reformed.
- c) Listen to this marvelous quote by John Robinson addressed to the Pilgrim Fathers setting out for the new world:

“I am absolutely convinced that the Lord has other truths to impart to us through His Holy Word. Personally, I cannot sufficiently deplore the condition of these reformed churches which have acquired a certain degree of religion, but which do not wish to go beyond their reformation. The Lutherans can see only what Luther saw; they would die rather than accept a certain aspect of the truth revealed to Calvin. As for the Calvinists, they cling to the heritage left them by that great man of God, who, nevertheless, did not know everything. It is deplorable poverty, for even if these men in their time were lamps which burned and gave light in the darkness, they had not yet entered into all the counsel of God. If they were living in our day, they would be ready to embrace a light which was more intense than the one which at first enlightened them.” (From Alfred Kuen’s book, “I Will Build My Church”)

- d) Merle d’Aubigne (pronounced *doo ben yah*), a famous French historian writes:
“As we advance through the centuries, light and life begin to decrease in the Church. Why? Because the torch of the Scripture begins to grow dim and because the deceitful light of human authorities begins to replace it.”
- e) *“The life of the church depends on one thing: her return to biblical principles.” (Otto Riecher)*
- f) *“The churches established by the apostles remain the valid models for churches of all times and places.” (Alfred Kuen, “I Will Build My Church”)*

3. We must return to the Bible and to the practice of the apostles.

- a) Thus, everything said in this series is built upon the Bible as our authority. Biblical eldership cannot be recovered if we do not have absolute confidence that

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped of every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

- b) Everything we need for Christian life and local church is in Scripture. Remember also that not only is the Scripture our authority for defining biblical eldership, but the Scriptures must be correctly interpreted.

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15)

- c) The Bible is our authority and we will work diligently, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to correctly interpret it. I believe biblical eldership is correctly representing the biblical teaching.