

View

A Publication of the Folsom Point church of Christ, 900 E. Natoma, Folsom, CA

March 16, 2008

J. W. McGarvey on the Eldership

Lately, several of our members have submitted the names of some of our men for consideration as elders and deacons. This is great! We will keep you posted on the progress.

Meanwhile, we would like you to continue to think seriously about the qualifications and the process for selecting elders. With that in mind, we'll print some articles for the next few weeks by plainspoken, pioneer preacher J.W. McGarvey. He was, among members of churches of Christ in the 19th century, a true scholar and, while we may not agree completely with his thoughts on the eldership (or appreciate his "plain-spokenness"), we will profit if we read and carefully weigh what he says. Reading this series of articles will give us a fresh perspective on the subject and help us make decisions in the best interest of the church.

Thank you.

David

QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE OFFICE

The qualifications for the office of an Elder are all prescribed by the Apostle Paul in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They are distributable into six natural divisions, and it will simplify our investigation to examine these divisions separately. They are distinguished as they relate respectively to experience, reputation, domestic relations, character, habits, and ability to teach and rule. We will consider them in this order.

1. *Experience.* We mean by this, experience in the life of a Christian. Paul says that an Elder should not be a new convert, lest, being lifted up with

pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. I Tim. 3:6. The reason here given shows that the office was one of high honor and responsibility; otherwise, the occupant of it would incur no danger of being lifted up with pride. The condemnation of the devil is the condemnation into which the devil fell, which, according to Paul's understanding of it, resulted from pride. A new convert would be more likely to fall into this sin than an experienced Christian, because he would more recently have escaped the habitual service of Satan, and would have led power to resist temptation. In assigning this qualification, the apostle shows how important it is that *pride of office* shall not characterize the Eldership. It is the same important lesson that Jesus taught the disciples when he said, "He that would be greatest among you, let him be servant of all."

Within what period after his immersion a man ceases to be a new convert, is not here indicated. It is left to the decision of those interested in the selection and ordination of Elders. It is not at all difficult for men of common sense to decide what members of a given church are new converts, although it would be difficult to express the idea more definitely than it is done by the apostle.

2. *Reputation.* The good which a church is capable of accomplishing in a community depends very much upon its reputation, and the reputation of the

church depends much upon that of its representative men. Most wisely, therefore, it is required that an Elder shall have a "good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." I Tim. 3:7. If he falls into reproach, not only is the church reproached with him, but he must soon lose his influence over the membership of the church, and it is difficult for the devil to construct a snare more likely to catch his victim than when he brings an Elder into reproach within the church. Both the Elder himself and many members of his flock are exposed to almost certain ruin in that event. Many brethren can be found who have been caught in this snare, and who are now either standing aloof from the church, or coldly and sourly looking on and criticizing those who do the work which they once failed to do.

This qualification has a necessary limitation. When they that are without are men who despise what is good, and hold in bad repute the man who acts according to the will of Christ, we can not understand the apostle to mean that the Elder shall have a good report from them; nor, indeed, does he refer to men of that character, whether many or few in the community. He refers to men whose opinion is worth considering, and who know the habits of the Elder. He must have a good report from them in regard to his moral and religious character.

It is seldom, according to our observation, that a church has been so thoughtless as to select a man for the Elder's office who was very deficient in this qualification, but it often happens that in the course of his career, an Elder falls into bad repute, sometimes unjustly, but oftener, justly. Many churches are now languishing under the incubus of an Eldership composed partly of such material, and they can never flourish till relieved by the death or resignation of the unfortunate party. It is too hazardous, in such cases, to wait for death to bring the desired relief, and voluntary resignations are least likely to occur with just that class of men. It is the duty, therefore, of all churches thus afflicted, to call upon the party to resign the office. It is a duty of a most delicate nature, requiring all the wisdom and prudence of which the leading men of the church are capable, but it must, at all hazards, be done. A conference of a large number of the more intelligent and disinterested members, conducted in the most private manner possible, and its decision communicated in the most considerate manner, will always effect the object with a man whose feelings are at all delicate. If, in any case, this should fail, more open and public means should be resorted to; for an Elder must have a good report from them that are without, and upon the church rests the responsibility of seeing that no man is retained in the office who does not possess this qualification.

3. *Domestic relations.* To Timothy and Titus both, the apostle prescribes that the overseer shall be the husband of one wife. There has been a vast amount of disputation as to whether this requires him to be a married man. It is alleged, in opposition to this idea, that when churches were planted among a people practicing polygamy, men would frequently be immersed who had a plurality of wives, and that

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Services

Sunday Morning Assembly
9:30 AM
Sunday Evening: 5:00 PM
Wednesday Bible Study
7:30 PM

Classes for all ages.

Private classes arranged
at your convenience.

For more information,

visit our web site at:

www.folsomchurch.com

Webmaster: Richard Harvey

Agenda

The Lord's Day, March 16, 2008

9:30 AM: Worship: Singing, Lord's Supper, Preaching
Sermon: The Story

● Preaching: The Story, David Posey

5:00 PM: Lord's Supper, Singing, Preaching

● Sermon: Romans (Apologetics), David Posey

5:30 PM: Bible Classes for ages 18 mos., & up

Auditorium: What Jesus Wants to Know (Jeff Clark)

Room 11-12: The Parables (David Byrd)

Room 8: Seed-Sowers (Dennis Wade & Cameron Carrozza)

Wednesday, March 19, 2008

10 AM "Jesus on Relationships": Auditorium, 10 AM

7:30 PM, Bible classes for ages 18 mos. and up,

Auditorium: The Sayings of Jesus (Rich Mowrer)

Room 11-12: Parenting by the Book (David Posey & Dennis Wade)

Notes

Most sermons are available in MP3 format on our website (www.folsomchurch.com) or on CD (see a deacon).

the apostle intends only to prohibit such from being made overseers. Undoubtedly the use of the numeral one in the text has this force, and it would be unlawful to place a polygamist or bigamist in the office. But while the expression has this force, we think that candor requires the admission that it also has the effect of requiring a man to be a married man. That he should be the husband of one wife, forbids having less than one as clearly as it forbids having more than one. If it be said that a man owns but one farm, it is just as clearly implied that he owns one as that he owns no more than one. Moreover, the context confirms the conclusion; for the apostle proceeds in both epistles to state how the overseer must govern his household, [56] and especially his children; which statements imply that he is to be a man of family.

It has been urged as an objection to this conclusion, that it would disqualify Paul himself, and Barnabas and Timothy for the office of Elder although they held offices or positions of much greater responsibility. But this objection can have no force, unless it be made to appear that these brethren were qualified for the Elder's office, or that the qualifications of an Apostle or an Evangelist include those of an Elder. Neither of the two, however, can be made to appear, and therefore the objection has no force whatever. Indeed, it seems most fitting that men whose chief work led them from city to city and nation to nation, through all

kinds of danger and hardship, should be freed from the care of a family, and equally fitting that the shepherd, whose work was always at home and in the midst of the families of his flock, should be a man of family. A married man certainly possess advantages for such work that are impossible to an unmarried man, and the experience of the world must confirm the wisdom of the requirement that the overseer shall be the husband of one wife. It may be well to add that one living wife is clearly meant, and that there is no allusion to the number of deceased wives a man may have had. If my wife is dead, I am not now her husband.

It is also required that the candidate for the Eldership shall "rule well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;" or, as it is expressed in Titus, "having faithful children not accused of riot, or unruly." The reason given for this requirement is this: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" The figure of interrogation is here employed in order to assert, most emphatically, that if a man does not know how to rule his own house, he cannot take care of the Church of God—he is incompetent to fill the office of overseer. It is altogether vain for uninspired men to demur against a decision so emphatically rendered by an apostle; we therefore accept it without quali-

Continued next week