



# Does God Hear the Prayers of Sinners?

Randy Blackaby

In John 9:31 it is recorded that a blind man healed by Jesus told the Pharisees, in defense of Jesus, “Now we know that God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.”

Do we conclude from this that anyone who is not a Christian is wasting his time to pray to God?

Notice in Acts 10:1-6 and 24-33 the case of Cornelius before his conversion. He was not a Christian. He was not even a part of God’s covenant with Israel. But he was a worshiper of God, generally righteous and a seeker after God. The text also says God heard his prayer.

But the statement of the formerly blind man isn’t without scriptural support. From the Old Testament we learn that God doesn’t listen to hypocrites (Job 27:7-10). He turns his ear from men full of evil pride (Job 35:9-13). Scorners, fools, those who hate knowledge, the wicked and those who turn away from the truth are similarly given a divine deaf ear (Prov. 1:28-30; 15:29; 28:9).

A better understanding of this issue probably will involve our definition of “sinner.” The most general meaning of the word would simply be anyone who has ever sinned. That includes all men (Rom. 3:23). Use of this definition would preclude prayer even by Christians who sin. The instruction to Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:22) would be erroneous.

A more common biblical use of the word “sinner” applies it to those who habitually practice sin, as opposed to inadvertent or occasional sinning.

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We must be careful not to construct an interpretation that precludes a sincere but unsaved man from seeking God’s help. Cornelius was unsaved when he first prayed — but his prayers were answered.

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# Let's Not Forget The Redemptive System

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**Manuscripts** should be sent to Mike Willis, 6567 Kings Ct., Danville, Indiana 46122-9075. He is available at 1-317-745-4708.

**All business matters** should be addressed to O.C. Birdwell, Jr. who serves as Executive Vice-President for the Guardian of Truth Foundation. He is available by phone at 1-800-633-3216 or by mail at P.O. Box 858, Athens, AL 35611.

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Donnie V. Rader

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a redemptive system. By that we mean that it is a system whereby man is redeemed from his sins. In contrast, some of the preaching we hear today, even among us, has robbed the gospel of its redemptive power

### The Need For Redemption

Man stands in need of being redeemed because of his sin. All have sinned (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 5:19). Sin (which is a violation of God's law) has consequences like the violation of any other law.

Sin causes one to die spiritually. That means man is spiritually *separated* from his God.

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death (Jas. 1:15).

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden [His] face from you, So that He will not hear (Isa. 59:2).

For the wages of sin [is] death . . . (Rom. 6:23).

Since our sin separates us from God, we stand in need of being redeemed.

### We Are Redeemed by the Blood of Christ

Even a casual reading of the Old Testament will reveal that God has always demanded a blood sacrifice to atone for sin.

The blood of animals could not remove sin (Heb. 10:4). However, the blood of the sinless Son of God would be the perfect sacrifice (Heb. 8 and 10).

Why did Christ have to die?

And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission (Heb. 9:22).

He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26).

see "Redemptive System" on p. 141

# Ellettsville Preacher Training Program

Connie W. Adams

The Preacher Training Program conducted by the Ellettsville, Indiana church of Christ will be held July 27-August 7, 1998. The program will include instruction in: Doing the work of an evangelist; Preaching in today's world; Carrying out the great commission; Overcoming stage fright; Finding and putting sermons together; Conducting weddings and funerals; Radio Preaching; Building a good library; Publishing a church bulletin; Teaching home Bible studies; Writing effective articles; Conducting gospel meetings; Studying and understanding the Bible; Learning to be a good listener; Bible history and geography; Combating false doctrines; Working with a local church, and other related matters.

As before, these classes will be taught by Johnie Edwards and Johnie Paul Edwards with guest speakers to address special subjects. Lodging and meals will be provided by local Christians for those who wish to stay in the area. Some have already registered and space is limited. Those interested should register soon. Write to:

Ellettsville Church of Christ  
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For the last two years it has been my privilege to speak once to these eager students. In my opinion, great good is being done by this concentrated period of studies. In addition to all-day classes, there is much work assigned to be done each evening. The approach is practical and militant.

Interestingly, this program inspired Paul Williams of Eshowe, South Africa to plan a similar two-weeks program patterned after this one in Ellettsville. I assisted Paul Williams in this program January 5-16. The remaining time was spent in the White River area and in Johannesburg area in preaching and teaching the word of God.

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*P.O. Box 69, Brooks, Kentucky 40109*

1997 Preacher Training Program, Ellettsville, Indiana

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# Chronic Tardiness

Larry Ray Hafley

We have all been “a few minutes late” for appointments. It generally is “no big deal.” However, because those who arrive late may disturb others, some schools, companies, corporations, and movie theaters let it be known that they *will not tolerate tardiness*.

Personally, I would rather be tardy to worship services than not be present at all — “better late than never,” I suppose!

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Does our tardiness show a lack of interest, a lack of concern? Probably not. But, on the other hand, does chronic tardiness display an eager, fervent spirit? “*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.*” Reckon David was late for services the day he wrote those words (Ps. 122:1)?

When we arrive late, we have missed something. Some part of the worship — an uplifting song, an introduction to the lesson, an opening prayer — all these we have missed. And, to some degree at least, we distract the attention of others when we rush in at the last moment.

Greeting one another, looking for visitors to meet, encouraging others with a pleasant, “How’re ya’ doin’, good to see ya,” — these and many other things go undone when we are late for services. Perhaps, for the sake of the weak and visitors who are looking for a friendly welcome, we should try to be a few minutes early. *Your* good influence, kind attitude, and friendly spirit are too much for us to miss! Don’t be late! *We need you!*

Arrive early! Stay late! I can’t get you here on time, but with the length of my sermons, I can see to it that you stay late!!

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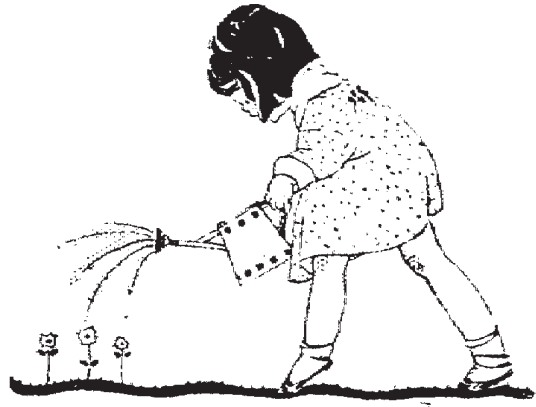
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# Plant and Water

Steven F. Deaton



**M**any congregations of the Lord's people are concerned these days, and rightly so, that we are a dying number! Fewer and fewer people are taking their stand with those seeking the old paths. In the midst of all of this, some fundamental facts are forgotten about laboring in the vineyard of the Lord. The denominations shoved them aside years ago, as well as the liberals, and now some of God's faithful are in danger of forgetting them. Lest we let them slip, let us study them.

## A Basic Fact

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). The *gospel* is God's power unto salvation!

First, we see that the gospel is the key to the conversion of an alien sinner (Rom. 10:8-17). The word of faith is, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:8-9). One is led to saving faith only after hearing the word of faith (Rom. 10:11, 17). Notice the following examples and how the word and the truth are connected to salvation, and vice versa.

## Positive

- Word — everlasting life (John 5:24).
- Truth — free (John 8:32).
- Truth — sanctifies (John 17:17).
- Word — believed (Acts 4:4; 15:7).
- Words — saved (Acts 11:14).
- Word — eternal life (Acts 13:48).
- Truth — trust (Eph. 1:13).

## Negative

- Snatch the word — non-belief (Luke 8:12).
- Have not his word — believe not (John 5:38).
- Put it [word] from — unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46).
- No love of truth — perish (2 Thess. 2:10).

The gospel of Christ is not only the key to conversion, but also to faithfulness and strength. John declares that in order to fellowship with the Father and Son, one must receive the things which he writes (1 John 1:3-4). Likewise, he goes on to point out that fellowship is based upon having his (God's) word — keeping his commandments (1 John 1:10; 2:3-5).

Moreover, the gospel is required for spiritual growth. Peter writes that the Christian was purified by obeying the truth and is strengthened by that same truth (1 Pet. 1:22-2:2). There is no getting around it, **THE *gospel*** is essential to a saint's edification and faithfulness! Look at the following examples and note the link between the faith and faithfulness, and vice versa.

## Positive

- Word — builds up (Acts 20:32).
- Word — gives inheritance (Acts 20:32).
- Gospel — saved (1 Cor. 15:1-2).
- Truth — growth (Eph. 4:15).
- Scriptures — salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).
- Word — saves (Jas. 1:21).

## Negative

- Fall away from the word — crucify the Son (Heb. 6:4-6).
- Called away from the gospel — fall from grace (Gal. 1:6-7; 3:1; 5:4).
- Put away the faith — shipwreck (1 Tim. 1:19).
- Err from truth — overthrow faith (2 Tim. 2:15-18).

## The Gospel Call

“Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:14). Those at Thessalonica, and *all* others, are brought unto the “glory of our Lord” by the gospel call! Note that the Bible nowhere says . . .

1. *The personality call.* One is not made a Christian by some man’s personality, no matter how sharp and witty it may be. The personality of the preacher or anyone else does not save souls (2 Sam. 15:2-6)!

2. *The prestige call.* Some men have college degrees with initials that would choke a horse following their names. Others are well known among brethren. However, every initial and all the fame in the world will not redeem one man (1 Cor. 1:26-27)!

3. *The eloquence call.* At times brethren think because a man is eloquent, that he will draw people to the water. They put stock in the sweet tongued man who can turn a phrase or spout big words, but this is not what saves a man (Rom. 16:18; 2 Cor. 10:10).

4. *The youth call.* Some have the fantasy that if they hire a young preacher or if they have a lot of young people, it will attract young members of the community. Yet, youth has not saved one person (Phile. 9).

5. *The ethnic call.* There are those who are attracted to religion because of their ethnic group. However, ethnicity does not wash away sins (Gal. 2:11-14).

6. *The relative call.* We all know of people who associate with a certain group because their family is in it. Catholics are famous for this. Still, not one person has been forgiven because of family relations (Matt. 10:34-37).

7. *The social call.* The liberals bought into this one. They, and many others, think that if they have a kitchen or a sports complex or a day care center, that men, women, boys, and girls will come to salvation. But, the fact remains, not a single solitary soul has been saved by social events (Eph. 4:17-19; 1 Pet. 4:3-5).

All of that leads us to this: *It is the gospel that draws sinners to God! It is the gospel that saves sinners! It is the gospel that redeems sinners!*

## Plant & Water

Having allowed the above to sink in, we realize that we must plant and water. “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6-7). We are commanded to plant (Matt. 28:19-20). We are commanded to water (Eph. 4:12-16). However, it is God who gives the increase. We work *with* God, not in place of God (1 Cor. 3:9). Therefore, we cannot promise numbers. We cannot say that we will baptize five, ten, or fifteen people this year, that is up to God. Remember Noah? Only eight people were saved on the ark (Gen. 7). What of the perfect preacher, Jesus? Many turned their back on him (John 6:44-45, 66). More people will reject the gospel than will accept it (Matt. 7:13-14). All we can do is plant and water!

There is nothing mystical, magical, or mysterious about conversion and growth — *preach the word!* It is the sword (Heb. 4:12). “And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5). Being grounded in truth led to being increased in number! We may need to remove sin from within the camp (Josh. 7-8). However, we can never compromise with error (Eph. 5:11). Fellowship with error only leads to corruption (2 Tim. 2:17; Gal. 5:7-10).

Brethren, “let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). Rather, let us speak “the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31)!

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# Convince or Confuse?

Joe R. Price

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Harry S. Truman is quoted as saying, “If you can’t convince them, confuse them.” Jesus was accused of using confusing language: “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly,” to which Jesus replied, “I told you, and you do not believe” (John 10:24). Our Lord spoke the word of God openly and clearly to the people (John 18:20). He commissioned his apostles to do likewise (Matt. 28:19-20). The purpose of gospel preaching is to convince and to persuade men of the Christ and his salvation (Acts 19:8; 2 Cor. 5:11). The Word did not come to confuse men. The Light of the World shined, and people who sat in darkness saw a great light (John 8:12; Matt. 4:16).

A tendency which has developed in our preaching is to avoid clarity of speech and decisiveness of doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2-5). Some brethren appeal to the complexity and difficulty of a doctrine as a reason for tolerance of and unity with opposing (and even contradictory) teachings and practices (cf. Eph. 5:8-11; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Some try to convince us that those who boldly preach the gospel on the controversial topics of the day (i.e., divorce and remarriage, fellowship, the role of women in the church, morality, etc.) are making themselves the standard to which compliance must be given. Is every man a law unto himself when it comes to these questions? Or can we know and obey Christ’s will, even on controversial topics (Eph. 5:17; cf. 1 John 4:1, 6; 1 Thess. 5:21-22)?

The “convince or confuse” approach preaches an uncertain gospel. For instance, what passes for gospel preaching on divorce and remarriage appears at times to be an exercise in confusing the audience. Can we not speak plainly and persuasively on this Bible topic? Jesus did (Matt. 19:3-9). He spoke with conviction on the origin of marriage (from God, 19:4-5). He plainly taught that what God joins together (the man and woman who are free to marry and who agree to marry) man is not to put asunder (Matt. 19:6). He was persuasive in clarifying a difference between the teaching of Moses and God’s intention on marriage from the beginning (Matt. 19:7-8). Without confusion he taught that anyone (“whoever”) who divorces his wife for a cause other than sexual immorality (fornication) and then marries

another person is guilty of adultery (Matt. 19:9). There is no confusion in his words that “whoever” marries a person who has been put away (divorced) commits adultery (Matt. 19:9). The confusion does not lie with Christ and his word. He is not the culprit of any confusion which exists on the topic of divorce and remarriage.

Some scoff at the notion that Christ’s teaching on divorce and remarriage is simple, straightforward, and can be consistently applied by men to their lives. They strenuously labor to *convince* us that the Bible teaching on the subject is *confusing*. They attempt to prove a complexity in God’s word which exonerates their fellowship with those who violate Christ’s teaching and with those who have not heretofore repented of their sin (2 Cor. 12:20-21; 2 John 9-11).

One’s marriage affects his eternal salvation (Heb. 13:4). Therefore, we can be sure that Christ has given us a clear message on the subject. The standard by which we must live and by which we shall be judged is within our ability to read, understand, believe, and obey (Rom. 10:17; John 6:44-45; 8:31-32; Matt. 7:21; Eph. 3:3-5; John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10).

At the same time, God expects man to use his intellect in learning the truth: “. . . how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)” (Eph. 3:3-4). Just as reading a newspaper requires the use of our reasoning capacities in order to understand it, God requires that we apply our ability to reason, comprehend and understand when it comes to his word of truth. God has revealed his will to *convince* us, not *confuse* us, but we must give ourselves to learning it.

To be *convinced* rather than *confused* by the word of God, there are several things we need:

1. *A good and honest heart (Luke 8:15).* The heart that is closed off to truth will not be convinced to walk in truth

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# Modesty, Propriety and Moderation

Linda Maydell

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There is almost nothing we women enjoy more than making ourselves look attractive. When someone tells us that we look nice, we feel great! God himself loves beauty. His love of beauty is obvious whenever we see a sunset sky, a seascape, or a sunbird. The creation has been clothed by God in such a way that it brings glory to him (Ps. 19)!

I believe God gave women a special gift of a deep sense of beauty as well. But he wants us to use this gift to his glory. I must clothe myself in such a way that the world will know that I am “God’s” woman.

1 Timothy 2:8-10 tells us: “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”

Women must first of all be “clothed.” In other words, they must cover the parts of their bodies that God considers shameful to be seen in public. However, our responsibility in our dress does not end here. It is altogether in keeping with the spirit of New Testament Christianity that sheer physical conformity to God’s dress code is not enough. God wants our clothing to tell the world the condition of our

“hearts.” Therefore, in 1 Timothy 2:8-10, God addresses three characteristics of the heart of a Christian woman which will guide her in the choosing of her wardrobe. Our dress is to reflect a heart that is characterized by modesty, propriety and moderation. No matter whether we are rich enough to buy a new dress each week or so poor that we go years without a new dress, we can still dress with these characteristics.

## Modesty

This word means orderly and neatly. It is the same word that people in New Testament times used to describe the creation. Everything in the creation fits together neatly like the pieces of a puzzle. Just as a missing puzzle piece mars the whole picture, so a missing button, a hanging hem, or dirty or torn clothing gives people who see us the impression that we are sloppy and lazy. Dressing neatly, on the other hand, lets people know that we have a conscientious heart.

God also created the universe in an orderly way so that nothing draws attention to itself by being out of place. Similarly I must never draw attention to myself by dressing unsuitably. I would not wear my smartest dress to work outside in the garden nor my oldest dress to a funeral. Sisters, I want you to think seriously about this: What kind of dress do you consider suitable to put on when you go to meet the

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regardless of the cost (Luke 8:11-14).

2. *A desire to do the will of God (John 7:16-17).* The person who wants to know and obey truth will be convinced by it, because its evidences of authenticity are adequate (John 20:30-31).

3. *Diligence in our study of God’s word (2 Tim. 2:15).* Some may be confused by the Bible because they have not adequately learned how to study it. Or, perhaps they have failed to diligently pursue an accurate use of it. Effort is required to come to a proper use of God’s word.

4. *Spiritual growth through being nourished by the word*

*of God (1 Pet. 2:2; 3:16-18).* Rome was not built in a day, and our journey toward spiritual maturity is a daily quest to press onward to the goal of heaven (Phil. 3:13-14). As we do so, we must commit ourselves to “*walk by the same rule*” of truth which was revealed by the apostles and prophets of Christ (Phil. 3:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:15).

The gospel *convince*s us of heaven’s reward. Let there be *no confusion!*

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335 Park Pl., Lynden, Washington 98264





Lord? What do you tell others about your feelings towards God by the way you dress in his presence?

### Propriety

This word means that we must have a sense of shame. It is not the same as the shame we feel when we are caught in doing something wrong, but an inward desire to be as far away from anything shameful as possible. It is this quality that causes me to consider the feelings of others and stay far away from any kind of dress that may cause someone to lust after me. It is this quality which causes me to wear my skirts more to the long side than to the short side and to wear my tops more loose than clingy, more high-necked than low-necked. Even by my dress, I make a statement about my feelings towards adultery, rape, jokes with sexual connotations, “adult” movies, and other sins of lust so prevalent in the world. I will be careful not to dress like those (e.g., pop stars) who promote fornication and rebellion. I will also show the world by my feminine attire (and hair style!) that I respect the womanly role God has given me and abhor homosexuality.

### Moderation

This word means inward self-control. It is this quality that will enable a woman to take the time and trouble needed to make sure her dress is modest and proper. Sometimes modest dress is not the most comfortable dress, especially when the weather is hot. It is hard to pay \$50 for a decent skirt when a cute mini only costs \$20. The world today promotes freedom and lack of inhibitions — wild hair styles, seven earrings per ear, dresses that cause everyone to turn around and stare. This is not moderation.

Finally, Paul sums up what he is saying by reminding us that a woman with a godly heart will devote her time, money and energy, not to her outward appearance, but to good works. I do not believe Paul is saying that it is totally wrong to wear any kind of jewelry or braid your hair. However, I do think every Christian should ask herself if she is spending more time on her physical appearance or on good works.

And before you spend a fortune at the hairdresser or buy a piece of jewelry that costs more than what you put in the collection plate, think if that is truly the best use of your money. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” How much treasure are you laying up on earth and how much treasure are you laying up in heaven?

Sisters, let us make a big effort to let our inward beauty so shine that even our outward dress is a reflection of it. And so may God be glorified.

### Questions

May a woman wear pants, make-up, jewelry or braided

hair? Many women have asked me these questions. In all of these questions, a woman must be guided first by the words modesty, propriety, and moderation. Another thing which a woman must consider in her dress is an attitude of submission towards her parents, if unmarried (Eph.6:1), or her husband, if married (Eph. 5:22). Therefore, even if, in my judgment, I consider any item of clothing to be modest, proper and moderate, I will not wear it if my husband/father does not approve.

*Pants:* In some cultures, both men and women both wear pants suits only (e.g., China). In other cultures (e.g., in Bible times) neither men nor women wore pants; both wore robes. Therefore, it is not the pants themselves that cause a woman to be considered masculine instead of feminine, it is our culture’s view of pants. If I wear pants, and it causes people in my culture to think that I am trying to be masculine, or that I am a harlot, or that I am desiring to be in the position of authority over my husband, then I will be violating a sense of propriety if I go ahead and wear them.

This is a very difficult decision to make in a country where different cultures are beginning to intermingle and ideas are beginning to change. A woman of meek and quiet spirit (1 Pet. 3:4) will never say by her clothing, “I don’t care what anyone thinks, I am going to dress the way I like.” However, people’s ideas may change over the years and there may be a time when it would not be wrong to wear pants in certain situations. For those women who do wear pants, please make sure that they are still feminine and that they are not revealingly tight. Also, in love, do consider the feelings of people of other cultures when you are around them.

*Braiding of hair and jewelry:* At first glance, braiding of hair and even the wearing of gold wedding rings seem to be condemned by 1 Timothy 2:9. If we look at the parallel passage in 1 Peter 3:3-4, I think we will gain the true understanding of the verse in Timothy: “Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” Peter is not saying that women must not wear jewels or braid their hair or put on apparel! He is saying that women must not put their emphasis on these things. If anything I wear — a dress, jewelry, or braids, calls undue attention to be given to my outward appearance, then I will not wear those things. Perhaps it will take too much of my time or money. Perhaps it causes others to envy me or pay me too much attention by their stares. Remember it is our good works that we should be remembered for, not our dress.

*Make-up:* Before being shown to the king, Esther was  
*continued bottom of next page*

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# Lynn Headrick Passes

Hiram Hutto

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On January 15, 1998 Lynn Headrick, faithful Christian and gospel preacher, passed away at his home in Anderson, Alabama, a few miles west of Athens. He was born May 31, 1928. He is survived by his good wife, Mary Faye (Hall), to whom he was married on September 4, 1953. Other survivors include his children, Doug Headrick, Deanna Haggemaker, Linda Gregory, eight grandchildren and three great grandchildren. Burial was in the Valley View Cemetery near Athens, Alabama.

Lynn was born about 20 miles south of Dallas, Texas, on a farm between Red Oak and Ferris. Later the family moved near Sinton, Texas. It was here that he learned the value of work. If you ever heard him preach very much, you heard him give some good illustrations of work on the farm and in the cotton gin. Probably it was here that his concern for the gospel in Mexico was kindled and continued until his death. This interest is manifested in that the family requested that instead of flowers, it would be appreciated that support for the Mexican work be given. This could be sent to Wayne Partain, a long-time friend and a faithful and tireless worker in that field. No doubt, there are scores of men preaching the gospel today among Spanish-speaking people as a result of the generosity of the Headricks and surely, there are hundreds of Spanish-speaking people who have heard the message of salvation through the efforts of Mary Faye and Lynn.

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given a beauty treatment which included perfume and cosmetics (Esth. 2:12). The pure bride in the Song of Solomon was told, "How much better is thy love than wine! And the fragrance of thine oils than all manner of spices" (Song 4:10). On the other hand, the harlot in Proverbs 7:17 tempted her victim with her perfume. If a woman uses make-up, perfume, jewelry, and dress in a way that helps her to be attractive in a wholesome way, she is a credit to her husband and to her God. On the other hand, she can use them seductively and be a credit to the devil. Or she can spend too much time and money on them and fail to store up treasure in heaven.

I first met Lynn about 40 years ago. By that time he had finished his BA work at Lipscomb and his MA degree at Peabody. He, with Sewell Hall, his future brother-in-law, moved to Alabama Christian College to teach school. While teaching there, he preached for the church at Ramer. Later he preached in Lafayette, Georgia, Acipco in Birmingham, and Saraland (Mobile) Alabama. His brother remarked to me that Lynn had always striven to reach a *higher* level, and this was true whether in work sports, education, or the Lord's work. This is seen in that in the early 1960s he decided to further his education and enrolled at the University of Alabama. At that time, there was no sound church there so seeing the need, one was established through his efforts. After finishing his doctoral work, Lynn moved to North Alabama where he served as Dean of Students at Calhoun Community College. Although his position there required much of his time his main concern and goal in life was preaching and teaching the word of God. In North Alabama he preached for the Valley View church near Athens and the Old Moulton Road church in Decatur.

Then he began work with the Jackson Drive church in Athens where he preached for 16 years. It was my good fortune to follow him in the work at Jackson Drive. I was able to see very early what a great work he did here. In fact, he did a good work wherever he went. After this he preached in the Birmingham area with the Sun Valley and Hueytown

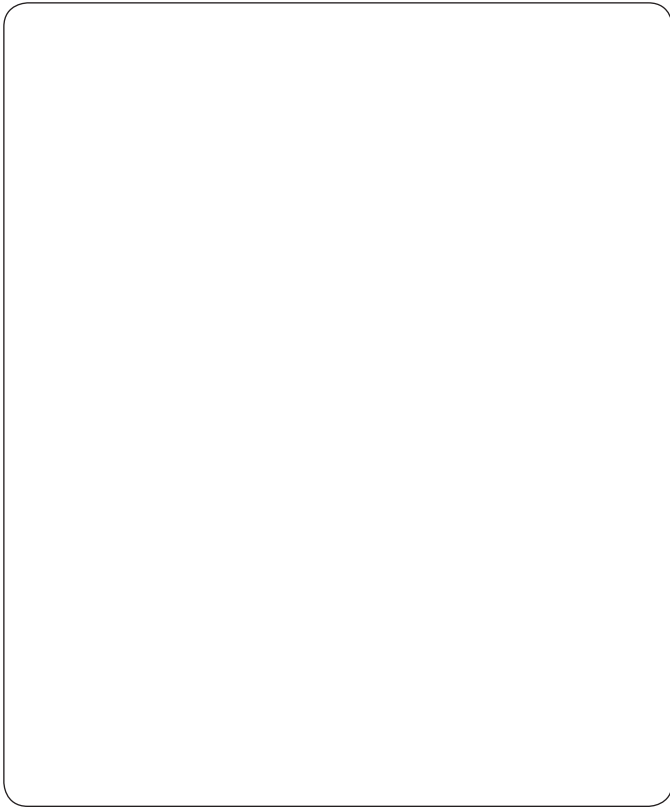
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Sisters, God has truly given us many things to consider when we choose what to wear. The wonderful thing about the Bible is that, even though it was written 2000 years ago and even though there are so many different cultures in the world, we can use the principles that God has given us so that today in South Africa we can dress in a way that pleases him and brings glory to him!

P.S. There's something else we could also wear more often — a smile! A smile says, "I care," in any language.

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*P.O. Box 51492, Wierda Park, 0149 South Africa*



churches. At the time of his sickness he was preaching with the New Georgia church in Anderson, Alabama, who were a great encouragement and support to him and his family during this trying time.

Lynn was characterized by many great and spiritual qualities. Like Nathaniel, he was an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile (John 1:17). Like the seven men in Acts 6, he was of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom; and like Barnabas, he was a good man (Acts 11:24). As David said of Abner, a great man is fallen this day in Israel (2 Sam. 3:38). Indeed he was a great man, and most everybody found that out, *except Lynn Headrick*. While he was characterized by humility, there was one characteristic that stands out in my mind. While serving as Dean at Calhoun, many opportunities arose for compromise, but he would not yield. When it came to matters of right and wrong, he was unyielding. May his tribe increase.

His influence for good is known far and wide. This is evident in that approximately 50 gospel preachers from as far away as Northern Indiana and Florida came to visit with the family.

The funeral director said that on the Friday night before the funeral service between 700 and 800 people came by. At the funeral service an overflow crowd of about 500 were present. I was honored to be asked to speak at the funeral service. Those assisting in the service were Jim Sasser, a close personal friend of Lynn and Mary Faye's for nearly

50 years, David McKee and Tim Sutton, two young people among many on whom he had great influence.

As noted at the funeral service, he would not have wanted any praise and adulation made about him, but rather just preaching the gospel. As noted earlier by his brother, Lynn always strived for a higher level whether in work, sports, education, or service to God. It is our considered judgment that he has now reached that higher level.

Sister Headrick can be reached at Box 10, Anderson, Alabama, 35610. Phone 205-247-7292.

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*211 Crutcher Cr., Athens, Alabama 35611*

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**“Prayers of Sinners”** continued from front page

At least one commentator suggests an even narrower use of the word “sinner” by the ex-blind man. He may have been contrasting heathens with worshipers of God.

We must be careful not to construct an interpretation that precludes a sincere but unsaved man from seeking God’s help. Cornelius was unsaved when he first prayed — but his prayers were answered.

His prayer was answered when God sent Peter to tell him words by which he and his household might be saved (Acts 11:14).

On the other hand, let us see from Cornelius’ example also that he was not saved by prayer but by faith in the sacrifice of Christ and obedience to the gospel preached to him.

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# The Coming of the Lord

Clint Springer

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Dedicated Christians live in anticipation of the second coming of Jesus. Whether that event transpires during our lifetime or many years from now, the attitude remains the same.

*Parousia* is the Greek word most commonly translated “coming,” and *Vine’s Dictionary* says it “denotes both an arrival and a consequent presence with.” This article is being written in order to clarify several points with relation thereto.

There are at least three Bible doctrines that are interrelated so far as time and event are concerned: The coming of Christ, the judgment, and the end of the world. A concise study of the New Testament leads to this conclusion. A resurrection of the dead may be classified as a fourth in that listing. “Second Coming,” however, may be considered somewhat arbitrary, as most Scriptures only speak of a coming without any numerical number. Hebrews 9:28 may be considered the exception, but in that passage the writer is also speaking of judgment after death — that which is still in the future for us.

Some verses, especially in Luke, are hard to interpret. Most of those verses are related to the destruction of Jerusalem, but also sound like the ending of the universe. A probable explanation is that the catastrophe of A.D. 70 prefigured the end of the world. Some of the saints were resurrected along with our Lord (Matt. 27:52), and the destruction of Jerusalem was certainly a judgment against the rebellious Jews of that age.

When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, the New Testament teaches that to have been a coming of the Lord (Matt. 24:30). However, it has been shown that “coming” does not demand a personal appearance of Christ, and such verses as Isaiah 19:1 in the Old Testament use that type of language when civil war in Egypt was being considered. Conversely, “Second Coming,” in our vernacular, implies all that was stated in paragraph one (1 Cor. 15:22-25).

Some believe the whole chapter of Matthew 24 (also Luke 21) relates only to the A.D. 70 event. However, the “day” of the second division is a time about which only the Father knows. On the other hand, Jesus knew when the Jerusalem catastrophe was to take place and so informed his disciples. That answered the second question asked by the disciples, and obviously pertains to the final end of all humanity.

A problem arises relating to that as the language is very nearly like Luke seventeen. The latter is believed to be the end of Judaism, but that event has already been suggested as a foreshadowing of the world’s end. It should also be understood that similar language does not always demand a single event.

Those who hold the view that Jesus literally returned in A.D. 70 also contend that all spiritual gifts ended at that time — that all the books of the New Testament were written before that date. While this seems like a moot point of argument, it should be remembered that spiritual gifts were given by the laying on of an apostle’s hand (Acts 8:18), and no doubt some of these lived beyond the A.D. 70 date. It is also true that those letters of Paul to the Gentiles have little to say about the Jerusalem catastrophe, as that event did not mean as much to the Gentiles as it did to the Jews.

In my Royal Publishers King James Bible, First Thessalonians is listed as having been written in A.D. 58, but in view of Chapter 2:16, which is written in the past tense, that, too, can be questioned. After charging the Jews with killing Jesus, and prohibiting the gospel from being preached to Gentiles, the last part of verse sixteen says, “But God’s wrath has come upon them at last!”

In those books written to Gentile churches, a clearer view of the final judgment may be found. Conversely, only Judea was involved when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem. 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Thessalonians 2, and 2 Peter 3 are passages directly related to the end of the world.

You may remember that after receiving their first letter, some of the Thessalonians thought the end was literally at hand. In the second book the apostle declared that a falling away had to come first, and we know that to have pertained to the Catholic system. Any good church history book will trace that falling away to its completion.

From John 20:17 we learn that Jesus did not immediately ascend to the Father, there is a difference between Paradise and the Heaven of God's throne, but did so afterward and was then crowned King (Luke 19:12). This was foretold by Daniel (Dan. 7:13,14). Thus we conclude that Jesus went before the Father with the blood of his sacrifice, then came back to earth and appeared to the apostles and several others.

His coming was foretold in the Old Testament, as is his final coming in the New. Just as many ungodly Jews were destroyed in A.D. 70, all who obey not the gospel will suffer the second death and be damned to outer darkness for eternity.

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2525 Shiloh Rd., Tyler, Texas 75703



## “Redemptive System” continued from page 2

That was the message that was preached as the apostles went forth preaching the word. They told of the Christ and how man could be saved through him (cf. Acts 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 13ff).

### Preaching That Guts The Gospel of Redemption

Any preaching that doesn't appeal to the gospel message as the message that redeems man from his sin, has gutted the gospel of its real power. Much of the preaching in the denominational world is a social message. Some of it sounds more political and patriotic than biblical. Even among us (both the “liberals” and yes, even the “conservatives”) there is preaching being done that addresses more social needs than spiritual.

I recognize that the Bible talks about aging and depression and human relationships. However, when our appeal in reaching out to the world is to help them with this difficulty in handling growing old or in having brighter days, then we have missed the redemptive system of the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a redemptive message. Let's preach it. Let's not be ashamed of it. Let's not lose sight of what is it and our need for it.

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# The Congregation as a Community

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Dale Smelser

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“As indicated in the following articles, Mike Willis and I have been working together on this subject for well over a year. While this resulting exchange is earnest, we hope you will see two brothers struggling to convey a scriptural understanding of congregational function, and to understand one another. There is not the full agreement either of us would like. But it is our contribution to the discussion of a perennial problem among brethren, without aiming to be partisan. I am sure we can benefit from subsequent contributions from others exhibiting forbearance. I acknowledge that if they are accurate, we ought to profit whether they demonstrate forbearance or not, but seeing longsuffering toward a brother makes immediate consideration of his material easier. Longsuffering, not compromise.” **Dale Smelser**

From studying first Israel, and then the apostolic churches, it is evident that whatever is going on in the world is going to affect churches. Effective resistance is achieved through vigilance and faith. But vigilance must not be so paranoid as to spurn everything unaccustomed, or we may bring upon ourselves the judgment accorded the Pharisees who were unaccustomed to people neglecting their traditional washings. Thus cautioned, we note a feminist movement that would disregard divine order and gender roles which are beneficial to women, men, and children. When a whole culture seems bent on destruction of male-female roles, it will take a lot of faith for Christians to stay their course. But it now appears also possible for resistance to be so misguided as to keep congregations from being what they were in the Scriptures.

The New Testament congregation was a community, its members sharing what as circumstances required, and always sharing more labor, responsibility, and activity than is found in some congregations today. Have some earnest views forbidding the presence of women during discussion and resolution meetings changed the community nature of the New Testament congregation?

There is a lack of leadership among men today. That is another symptom of our times. Trying to offset this flaw rather than curing it, has done two unfortunate things. To avoid female

usurpation some have decreed that a woman must never be present when congregational decisions are made. Next, the idea necessarily follows that assembled congregations can take no decisive action. This has reduced the assembled congregation to being an entity only for social worship, transferring virtually all other function to a “men’s business meeting,” or to the burden of elders. A meeting of men, or certain men, may have its place, but to dictate that *every* decision must be made therein in order to alleviate men’s weak leadership is unwarranted, unscriptural, and paradoxical.

I have seen two examples cited as authority for limiting *all* congregational decisions to meetings of *only* men. Both are inadequate. They are where Paul met privately in Jerusalem with those “who were of repute,” and where the apostles in Acts 6 decided upon the necessity of servants and how many. In the first instance Paul met with those he thought were influential and thus could help in the controversy about circumcision, but *no congregational decision* was made. That came after the whole congregation was involved. And what congregation do you know that allows only those reputed to be pillars (Gal. 2:9) to attend business meetings? And who would make the decision for the congregation about who is of repute? In the second circumstance the apostles after forming a plan, assigned a decision to the congregation. For elders to lead congregational action,

similar planning and decisions are necessary. But apart from that, where is authority *exclusively* to employ any group of men-saints, separately and finally, to make *every* congregational decision by themselves? Not even the apostles did that (Acts 6).

The following is not to say that leadership does not belong to men. It is not to say that details of congregational decisions cannot be relegated to a group of men. It is not to say that women must be present where every plan is made. This primarily is not even about the participation of *women* in congregational affairs. It is about more congregational community and function. In your experience, apart from social worship, for what does the whole congregation, as the congregation, come together today?

It is not my aim to get women into a “business meeting” where a congregation has assigned men to accomplish something. But as for general men’s business meetings, some have become so authoritarian, exclusive, and institutionalized that they have no semblance to anything in the Scriptures. I do not believe Acts 6, Acts 15, or any of the other examples cited tell us anything about them. If one must categorize these conclusions, let it be with *the community of the assembly of saints* in a locality, where there is congregational sharing in responsibility. The alternative is lordly hierarchy and dominated attenders. When the group shares responsibility and has the wise and mature leadership of scriptural elders, and is served by deacons “set over” specific tasks, the local community approaches that ideal description of the body, “fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part.” I believe some places are falling short of “multitude” activity. Where that is true, New Testament example is being neglected and a detached “laity” may evolve. Compare that to the sense of community, congregational involve-

ment, and responsibility sharing found in the examples following.

### 2 Corinthians 8:19

A brother was appointed by *churches* to travel with Paul. The churches had to make a decision. This doesn’t say men’s business meetings made decisions. Could *separated* men in each group have discussed this and made a recommendation accepted by each respective congregation? Yes. Is that what happened? There is not a soul on earth who can establish that, or the necessity of that happening. The Holy Spirit said the *churches* appointed. The churches may have used various methods, but no one method can be bound in the absence of a statement, exclusive example, or inference. And if the text says *congregations* appointed, that authorizes *congregational* action. That authorizes the presence of the spiritual community in the making of this appointment, or acceptance of a recommendation, which itself is a decision. But the text says the *congregations* made that decision. In no way can this be used to *bind* the practice of a smaller group *exclusively* making *all* decisions for the congregation.

As in the selection of servants, the congregation likewise here is authorized to appoint its representatives, and no one method larger or smaller therefore can be *bound*. Thus an assembly of the community is authorized for the making of the appointment. Can anyone show a statement, implication, or example to prove otherwise? The answer is, no. Can elders, or other leaders where no elders exist, do the ground work and make persuasive and compelling recommendations? Yes, but the ultimate appointment lay with the congregations complying with good leadership. Could there have been a choice so apparent that the elders recommended it *in the assembly* and brought about agreement and a decision then and there? Obviously. That is authorized, whatever acceptable method may have been used.

But it has been argued that the implications of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12, giving leadership to men, prohibit the very **presence** of women when such decisions are made. Now please note this, and note it carefully. These passages in no way imply that women could not have been present when the decision to appoint the brother to travel with Paul was made. In fact, if these passages apply to decision making occasions, *they imply the presence of women*. In the first, they are present, not at home. In the second, their presence necessitates their relational quietness. How can passages regulating presence be used to decree absence? Understand that the primary purpose here is not to get women into decision making meetings, but to accept the sense of community seen in New Testament congregational function. It is to say that congregations, *congregations*, assembled, or could assemble, for action and certain decisions, and not just for “worship services” and receiving decisions.

### 1 Corinthians 5

“Ye being gathered together . . . deliver such a one unto Satan.” The congregation, the whole congregation, is authorized to assemble to effect congregational action. An action was taken. It was not done in a men’s business meeting, a meeting of those of repute, or of men recognized by the congregation to plan this, or by elders where existing. Any such leadership may initiate and lead to this, but they do not make the decision solely and only announce it. The congregation, the assembly, the community, was required and present to effect it. The man wasn’t “delivered” until the gathered assembly did it.

### Acts 6

The apostles told the “multitude of the disciples” to look out seven men. In their leadership and seeing what was needed, had a decision been made about solving the need? Yes. This would be analogous to what elders do in leading the flock. But this initiating

action required a subsequent *congregational* decision to be made. Choosing is a decision. And the whole multitude chose (v. 5). Could various methods of selection have been used by the multitude? Yes. Did they relegate it to a men's business meeting? No one can prove that. Can we insist then that such meetings are the *only* way for every decision to be made? No. Since the assembled multitude was told to choose, "and they chose," would that authorize doing such in that capacity, then and there, if feasible? Yes. Authorizing a congregation to do something authorizes the congregation to do it, not any specific method. **They could therefore use the assembly method** in selecting servants or other representatives.

But, the argument again arises, since men are given leadership, women inferentially must not be present. That assertion falls far short of an inference. And it proves too much. Are men given leadership in assemblies of liturgical worship? Yes. Since they are given leadership, does this then forbid the presence of women *there*? If men having leadership prohibits the presence of women, women must not be present for preaching or the Lord's supper.

Relevantly, the assembling of the whole multitude was with reference to "this business" (v. 3). It is therefore scriptural for the congregation to come together for the purpose of expediting by choices, decisions, certain matters of function, or "business."

Again it is objected, if women are present, they *might* speak out, or try to dominate the procedure, which they must not do since men have the leadership. If that is a valid argument, then again it means, since men have leadership in liturgical service, women must not be there or else they *might* speak out or try to dominate the procedures. If the possibility does not prohibit their presence in the one circumstance, it does not in the other. And besides that, the fact is, the congregation was there to expedite business. It is extremely arbitrary to insist that the apostles went to the trouble of calling the whole multitude together for 15 seconds of instruction with no discussion or questions, and then required their dispersal so the men, isolated, could decide the procedures, make the plans, and effect how *they* would make the choice for the multitude. However spiritually sound that may seem to some, the Holy Spirit, by the words recording this example, *requires and authorizes* a choice, a decision, by the whole multitude.

### Acts 15

"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose. . . . and send" (v. 22). Something was concluded, decided, with whole church complicity. Was it a levied decision accepted distributively? The language does not say that. It states actual participation; a decision **concluded**, with the assembly *involved*. Concerning the meaning of the word rendered "it seemed

good": "The meaning *to conclude* (emph. added) is found especially in Acts (e.g. 15:22, 25, 28)" (NIDNTT); "*Dokeo* has the force of 'decided' in Acts 15:22" (Kittel). The whole church was in on the deciding. Thus as used in this context, "*dokei* 'it seems good' . . . is the technical term of Gr. of all periods for 'voting' or 'passing' a measure *in the assembly*" (Lake & Cadbury in *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*). How? By voting, acclamation, lack of objection? No one knows the method by which the leadership involved the congregation, though popular vote tabulation can be eliminated. This, even though one may wonder at the example of the successor to Judas being selected by lot. That selection does not indicate ballot voting. Lots were put forth for Matthias and Barsabbas respectively, and by indicating one in some manner, the Lord showed who was *his* choice, as the apostles had prayed.

However, in the past many brethren such as T.B. Lari-more made a case for congregational voting. It kept a small minority from hobbling the rest of the congregation. On the other hand, allowing voting gives opportunity for lobbying the immature and outvoting the wiser and more spiritually inclined, devaluing the counsel of mature wisdom. And decision by ballot may inhibit love and wisdom wherein a majority may forgo some things for the sake of others' conscience. Neither majority rule nor coercive minority was the basis for congregational decision making, as indicated in my booklet, *The Rule of Elders*:

In all this inclusive participation we must not conclude the congregation is to function as a *pure democracy*. Christ established *function by leadership*. There are, after all, those who are chief (Lk. 22:26), first (Matt. 20:27), and leaders (Heb. 13:7, 17). He did not intend for minimum knowledge and brash assertiveness to have equal influence with wisdom, proven service and spiritual maturity, as can happen in a democracy. So while Christ banishes personal authority and dominion, he has ordained a leadership by the mature, the exemplary, the spiritually experienced, and the knowledgeable. It was the job of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to perfect the rest (Eph. 4:11-12). Whether these were gifted or not is not the point. It was the truth and spiritual wisdom abiding in them that gave them leadership, however it resided there. This spiritual leadership finds continued residence in his shepherds, elders. While other good and knowledgeable disciples may exercise leadership, Paul demonstrated respect for the *assigned* leadership of elders by calling the elders at Ephesus to him at Troas for a final personal reminder of their responsibilities (Acts 20:17-38). Significantly, we are not told to follow the novice and the immature, or ones who covet influence without attaining the necessary qualifications of character, knowledge and experience (18).

Voting aside, a whole assembly is still specified as involved in what was "decided." To find harmony here with insistence that separated men make *all* decisions *alone*, just



cannot be done. Hence one must not bind this latter preference as an exclusive pattern for making *all* congregational decisions. To suppose that something didn't *necessarily* happen in the assembly does not prove it *did not and must not* happen in the assembly, especially when the text states that the assembly did something. For in the absence of a specific example, inference, or statement otherwise, this *authorizes* the assembly, as the assembly, to do it.

Do I believe women publicly voiced individual opinions in the assembled congregation at Jerusalem? I do not. It is shameful for a woman to speak in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:35). But may she make suggestions to leaders and then be present in the assembly when decisions are finalized, to observe and share in the informed consensus? This whole passage cries out in the affirmative. Assembly action does not require everyone's speaking. It does not mean that all men, or all red-haired men, or all of any specific classification actually addressed the assembly. But the decisions were consummated, with the whole assembly. The whole assembly was involved in choosing and sending. The language here *authorizes*, even if, as some imagine, it does not delineate it, the presence of the entire assembly when some decisions are made and actions taken. This does not say they always must be present for the decision of every detail. Remember the plan the apostles set before the multitude in Acts 6. It pleased the multitude who accepted and acted upon it. And related to the assigned work the chosen deacons were "set over," they must have made numerous decisions which require so many business meetings now. But to forbid congregational presence at some level, decreeing instead a "men's business meeting" as the exclusive forum for *every* decision in the absence of elders, is to insist upon something we do not find specifically in any Scripture, while totally rejecting that for which we have both stated and exemplified authority. And note, even with elders, there was congregational participation. No doubt the faith of James, and the good judgment and respected leadership of the elders, and agreement of the apostles, provided the circumstances for the salutary actions taken.

### And More

In the passages cited, congregations, assemblies, are authorized to choose messengers to carry money, to assemble to note a sinner, to select deacons, and to have part in sending a letter and choosing its carriers. Such congregational involvement can be seen also in Acts 13:1-3; 15:1-3; 15:4-6, 15:30-31; and 14:27, where assemblies are authorized to designate and send out preachers, appoint and arrange to send men on a designated mission, participate in settling controversy, assemble to receive a communication from elsewhere, and hear reports on evangelism. All this is to say that congregations met for more and were involved in more than some current opinions allow, limiting any action of the whole assembly to little other than "worship services." To do that is to change the very nature and community of the

New Testament congregation. That loses something of the nature and relationship of God's people, however well and orthodoxly intentioned. That is my concern.

This contention for making *all* decisions apart from the congregation and thus away from the presence of women, is obliged by the unwelcome consequence of other beliefs. They are, that women need not remain silent in the assembly, but may speak as long as they do so with subjection, quietly (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Another is that the "silence" requirement at Corinth was only for the time of spiritual gifts, or for the wives of the prophets. Another is that the silence is only for liturgical assemblies, not for other assemblies. All these positions would allow women to speak today in such assembly discussions as that one in the Jerusalem church about circumcision, and publicly to join any "much questioning" as occurred there before the multitude fell silent. Yet people whose positions would allow that, think the advocacy of congregational involvement as there, is the rankest of dangerous heresy. It is too cosmetic to pretend Acts 15 was just a debate. But if it were, *all* the positions above would allow women joining it, if done "with subjection." Thus to avoid in congregational function, what their positions justify, some decree that women must be kept out of decision making meetings. (*Tradition* will keep them from speaking in the "worship service.")

Constraint of space inhibits making the case for the input of godly women and their good influence on a congregation, and expressing sufficient gratitude for it. But their participatory conduct in private counsel, in separated classes, and in work groups, will be within divine parameters (1 Tim. 2:11-12), and *in the assembly* will be governed by non-speaking (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Some will ask, "Why then have 'them' there?" That sounds arrogant, and considering what the Holy Spirit recorded, is presumptuous. Why have women present for preaching? Let us activate and involve today's congregations in all they were in the New Testament, and be blessed by the ensuing community.

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# A Response to A Congregation As Community

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Mike Willis

My good friend Dale Smelser has presented for our study the preceding article on how decisions are to be made in the local church. Brother Smelser is an honorable man whose knowledge of the Scriptures and moral character commend itself to us. He deserves to be heard and, therefore, his material is presented. Because there are some statements with which I have disagreement, this response is being offered for your consideration as well.

Brother Smelser does not wish to lend support to the women's liberation movement and is definite in stating that when the whole church assembles, women are commanded by God to keep silent. We appreciate these statements.

Brother Smelser argues for *some* decisions being made by congregational, decision-making assemblies, with women present, in addition to *some* decisions being made by elders or men's business meetings. Whereas brother Smelser admits that private meetings can be conducted by elders and men's business meetings, in which *some* decisions binding on the whole church can be made, he argues that the Bible also authorizes congregational assemblies for the purpose of decision making.

## Looking at the Scriptures on Leadership

Before looking at brother Smelser's specific arguments, one needs to review what the Scriptures teach about leadership in the home and the church. The role of leadership, including decision making, has been given to the man. The man is the head of the home, just as Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23). As the head of his home, he is to provide the same loving, nurturing, and cherishing leadership that Christ provides for his church (Eph. 5:25, 29). His is not to be a selfish, dominating leadership similar to a tyrant.

In the church, God placed leadership in the hands of men, giving specific qualifications for those who are appointed to serve (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-7). These men are overseers (Acts 20:28) who have the responsibility to "rule" (1 Tim.

5:17). They are the "government" that God has instituted for the church (1 Cor. 12:28). The church is obligated to be submissive to their rule (Heb. 13:17). Elders are cautioned about "lording" their will over the flock (1 Pet. 5:3). Consequently, their leadership and rule is not that of dictators who never consider the will of those whom they lead. Any charge that I am defending "lordly hierarchy and dominated attenders" would be inaccurate.

There is nothing inconsistent with overseeing the local work for the elders to receive input from and give information to the congregation. That is wise leadership. There are decisions that have to be made with reference to which others inside or outside the congregation are much more knowledgeable than the elders; elders frequently have made use of that technical knowledge to make wise decisions, even if that technical information must be gained from non-Christians (for example, an architect who works on building plans). There needs to be congregational involvement in many aspects of the local work, even though God

The role of leadership, including decision making, has been given to the man. The man is the head of the home, just as Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23). As the head of his home, he is to provide the same loving, nurturing, and cherishing leadership that Christ provides for his church (Eph. 5:25, 29).



has given to elders the role of oversight and ruling (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17).

Brother Smelser wrote,

But as for general men's business meetings, some have become so authoritarian, exclusive, and institutionalized that they have supplanted community. I do not believe Acts 6, Acts 15, or any of the other examples cited tell us anything about them. If one must categorize these conclusions, let it be with the community of the assembly of saints in a locality, where the whole group shares in congregational action. The alternative is lordly hierarchy and dominated attenders.

Brother Smelser creates a false dichotomy in arguing his position for decision making by the whole congregation. Anything less than decision making by the entire congregation is "lording it over the flock." He said, "The alternative is lordly hierarchy and dominated attenders" (par. 6). This conclusion does not logically follow. Godly elders can oversee a congregation without relegating decision making to the "consensus" of the congregation and without "lording it over the flock."

### **What Role Do Elders/Men's Business Meetings Have in Decision Making?**

Brother Smelser argues for *some* decisions being made by the congregational assembly in contrast to them being made by business meetings or elders.

To avoid female usurpation some believe a woman must never be present when congregational decisions are made. Next the idea necessarily follows that assembled congregations can take no decisive actions (par. 3).

But apart from that, where is authority *exclusively* to employ any group of men-saints, separately and finally, to make all congregational decisions (par. 4).

A brother was appointed by *churches* to travel with Paul. The churches had to make a decision. This doesn't say men's business meetings made decisions (para. 7).

Brother Smelser gave an example of how elders lead in making a decision. He wrote,

... The congregation here is authorized to appoint, and no one method larger or smaller can be *bound*. Thus an assembly of the community is authorized for making the appointment. Can anyone show a statement, implication, or example to prove otherwise? The answer is, no. Can elders, or in their absence others, do the ground work and make persuasive recommendations in their leadership? Yes, but the ultimate appointment lay with the congregations (par. 8).

This cited example emphasizes for us the issue before

us. Brother Smelser is calling for a different kind of decision making (rule/oversight) for the congregation. Elders can take leadership and make recommendations (persuasive speeches), but *the decision is made by the congregation*. He also says that in the absence of elders others can do the same (take leadership and make recommendations). Could those "others" be women? Could they make persuasive recommendations to the congregation? Brother Smelser says "no," women cannot speak when they attend business meetings, but others who call for women attending business meetings say "yes" they can speak and discuss the relative merits of the various alternatives. And, one may ask, could "others" take leadership and make persuasive recommendations when elders are present in the congregation?

The main point of the quotation cited above is to observe that *some of the decisions are made by the congregation*, not by elders! This effectively changes the government of the local church from a body overseen by elders to a body that is governed by what some have termed "consensus."

Brother Smelser believes that "some places are falling short of 'multitude' involvement" by allowing *all* decisions to be made by elders alone or by men's business meetings in the absence of elders. As a matter of fact, he goes further to charge that the church that has its decisions made *solely* by elders or men's business meetings "loses something of the gospel of Christ." He wrote: "That loses something of the gospel of Christ, however well and orthodoxly intentioned. That is my concern here" (par. 19).

Brother Smelser admits that elders and men's business meetings have the right to make *some* decisions for the church, but not *all*. He needs to provide us a list of what decisions they have the right to make and what decisions they do not have the right to make. Then he needs to provide us the *criterion* by which he makes this distinction so that we can evaluate it. I understand and concede that the church has the right to select its own officers (Acts 6:3). It also has the right to remove men who become unqualified to serve. However, the selection of elders is for the purpose of their taking the "oversight" (1 Pet. 5:2 — *episkopeo* — "to look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for: spoken of the care of the church which rested upon the presbyters," Thayer 242), "ruling" (1 Tim. 5:17 — *proistemi*: "to be over, to superintend, preside over," Thayer 539; this word is used to compare the husband's rule in the home to the elder's rule in the church, 1 Tim. 3:5), and to "rule" (Heb. 13:7, 17 — *hegeomai*: "to be a leader; to rule, command; to have authority over. . . so of the overseers or leaders of Christian churches," Thayer 276). What is here given to the elders in their authority to oversee and rule is withdrawn to the degree that they are limited in the decisions they can make.

This might be compared to the elections of the United

The church has just as certainly made its decision when that decision is made by its elders (or men in a business meeting) as when the whole congregation gets together and decides things by “consensus.” The question is this: which of these two methods of decision making is authorized in the Scriptures, “consensus” or decision making by elders?

States selecting men to be Congressmen. When they are selected to be Congressmen, they have the right to make decisions for the the American people. The American people have the right to put them in office and remove them from office. However, the decisions of raising taxes, the budget, and such like things belong to them. What would be the need for having Congressmen if matters had to be decided by general consensus of the citizens of the United States?

#### **Multitude Involvement**

Brother Smelser speaks of “multitude involvement” and the “assembly method” of decision making. What is this method of decision making? These are non-biblical terms, although brother Smelser thinks the concept is found in the Bible. But, what is the “assembly method” of decision making? It is not a decision made by elders, because brother Smelser has argued for the assembly method in contrast to that. It is not a decision made by only the men of the congregation, because it is made by the whole congregation. If there is anything less than the total assembly making the decision, he has reduced decision making to that which he opposes — a group smaller than the whole church. He explained that whole church complicity was different from that done by elders or the men of the congregation saying, “To find harmony here with insistence that separated men make *all* decisions alone, just cannot be done” (par. 17). Hence, anything less than the total church — including women and baptized children — does not fit his mold.

He argues that no specific method of assembly decisions is legislated. “Authorizing a congregation to do something authorizes the congregation to do it, not any specific method. They could therefore use the assembly method” (par. 11). If he is correct, they could use any other method as well because general authority does not restrict. The conclusion logically follows that decision making by “consensus” is

just as biblically authorized as decisions made by the elders. If not, why not?

Brother Smelser here contends for “consensus,” whether that “consensus” be obtained by positive or negative form (lack of objection), as one authorized means for congregations to make decisions. If women and children do not participate in the “consensus” (decision making), then the decisions are made by some group less than the total church, although those decisions are made by the smaller group in the presence of the rest of the church.

Brother Smelser is contradicting himself when he appeals for decisions by the whole church (in contrast to those made by a group smaller than the whole corporate body) and women being silent in the assembly where that decision is made. What kind of “whole assembly” decision making can occur when over 50% (women and children) are not permitted to speak? They cannot express what they think about the thing proposed. If they participate in the decision, they are a part of the “consensus”; if they do not participate in the decision, then a group smaller than the whole church has made the decision!

Brother Smelser is logically compelled to one of two choices: (a) accept that a group less than the whole church (elders or, in the absence of elders, the men of the congregation) *always* makes the decisions or (b) allow women and children full participation in the decision, thus reducing congregational decision making to “consensus.”

#### **The Church Decided**

Brother Smelser’s proofs all fall into one category, although several Scriptures are cited (Acts 6; 13:1-3; 15:1-3, 30-31; 2 Cor. 8:19; 1 Cor. 5). The point of these texts which he thinks support his conclusion is this: “the whole multitude chose. . .,” “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send. . .,” and “who was also chosen of the churches.” Brother Smelser concludes from these statements that the decisions were made by the whole congregation in its assembled body, not by its representatives. This is an *inference* from the text, the conclusions to which brother Smelser himself would reject (that is, men, women, and children making decisions through “consensus”); it is not a *necessary inference*.

Paul wrote, “The churches of Asia salute you” (1 Cor. 16:19). How did they do that? Did the whole congregation meet together in its corporate capacity in the various cities of Asia and send their greetings? No, they sent their greetings through their representative, in this case the letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

The church has just as certainly made its decision when

that decision is made by its elders (or men in a business meeting) as when the whole congregation gets together and decides things by “consensus.” The question is this: which of these two methods of decision making is authorized in the Scriptures, “consensus” or decision making by elders?

The language of the cited texts (“the church chose”) is very common. A person reads in the newspaper that IBM decided to do something. How did IBM make that decision? Does anyone believe that IBM gathered all of its employees in a room and that the whole group participated in the decision? Everyone understands that IBM made a decision through its representatives appointed to make decisions (board, CEO, etc.). In a similar way, when we read that the church decided to do something, we make an unnecessary inference when we jump to the conclusion that the decision was made by someone other than its appointed representatives (elders). We frequently read about decisions made by IBM that “please” the corporation. Does that mean that the corporation assembled all of its employees together and a poll was taken to see how many liked the decision? Obviously not! On what basis can we make a similar conclusion when we read about the church being pleased about something?

### Answering Some Questions

Brother Smelser asked, “Where is authority *exclusively* to employ any group of men-saints, separately and finally, to make *all* congregational decisions?” In response, we see that elders are limited to “men-saints” (1 Tim. 3:1-7) and that they have the role of oversight (1 Pet. 5:1-4; Acts 20:28). If elders cannot make *all* decisions, brother Smelser needs to define for us what decisions they have authority to make. I respond by asking brother Smelser, “Do you believe that they have the right to make *any* decision that is binding on the whole church?” I know that he will answer “yes,” so we ask him to tell us what decisions they can and cannot make and what criterion he uses to make that distinction. If the answer were “no,” then elders would be reduced to vote counters for the congregation, because the decision-making authority resides *solely* in the congregation, not in the elders.

### The Role of Women

Brother Smelser insists that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 forbids women speaking when all of the congregation is in one place (without regard to the kind of meeting that is conducted). He believes that stating that women can never be present when decisions are made is wrong (and I agree). But, he goes on to state the New Testament shows a pattern of “whole multitude choice” in contrast to decisions made by the men isolated from the rest of the congregation. The “whole multitude choice” logically implies women helping to make the decision. This raises a multitude of questions for brother Smelser: (a) When the women outnumber the men in reference to a particular decision, which choice is made? Does “whole multitude choice” mean that the decision supported by the women in the majority predominates over the choice preferred by the minority of men? (b) How do women express their part in the “whole multitude choice”? (c) If the children of a congregation have the majority vote in a congregation, should the “whole multitude choice” method of decision making follow the decision of the children?

### Conclusion

The material submitted by brother Smelser, however well intentioned, undermines the role of elders in decision making and substitutes in its place decision making by the assembled congregation.

Let me close by saying again, that the alternative to what brother Smelser proposes is not tyrannical elders who have no regard to the will of those whom they lead. Just as the husband being head of the wife does not justify or defend autocratic and despotic husbands, neither does contending for the oversight of elders lead to the conclusion that elders are tyrants. Just as egalitarianism in the home (male and female with equal authority) undermines the authority of the husband in the home, so does whole congregation decision making undermine the authority of elders.



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# Reply

Dale Smelser

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I appreciate Mike's offer to reply to his response. We have been working at this for over a year. Charges of inconsistency, which may be only in the mind of one who misconstrues what is being discussed, and the iteration of things that seem problems, do not mitigate scriptural prescriptions. Apart from a few observations I am happy to leave it to the reader to judge the applicability of Mike's objections.

His first statement shows what colored his response. He thought my article was about *how* decisions are to be made in the local church and that it advocated egalitarianism, which I explicitly rejected. My article is about congregations being involved in things beyond just liturgical worship. It was critical of a view that decrees that *all* decisions be made by elders or men's business meetings. That is lordly, and destroys community (sharing). On that limited theme, his third paragraph is a better description of what I believe, if elders' decisions being "binding on the church" means such as, "We need some servants to take over a certain work and we need seven of them. Choose." He would have done well to answer what he there said I believed, and which is a pretty good summary of what happened in the New Testament.

That congregations in Scripture made some decisions has long been recognized among brethren. There was a recent article here by Weldon Warnock which said: "Each congregation has the right to choose its own officers. Acts 6:1-7 shows this . . . The church did the selecting and the apostles appointed." He quoted McGarvey: "We conclude that all church officers were selected by the congregation at large." He quoted DeHoff: "The New Testament teaches that the power to select officers is in the church itself . . . The church selects its own functionaries *for any purpose whatsoever* (emph. DS) . . . It is not right for a handful of chosen members to get off in a corner and say, 'We'll pick out so and so and tell the church.'" If all this is accurate, neither men's business meetings nor elders' meetings are the forum of *all* decisions. What I am saying is not "different." Noting my article, which Mike had before he had Weldon's, it is especially in the area of functionaries, representatives, and

messengers that I gave scriptural examples.

Mike's objections to my use of a church appointing its messenger (2 Cor. 8:19) is defused by the quotations from Warnock's article. If those quotations state truth, some decisions were made by the congregation. Choosing is a decision. The whole multitude chose in Acts 6. Therefore the whole multitude made a decision. The congregation made a decision about "business" (Acts 6:3). He opines that "whole multitude choice" must somehow inappropriately involve women and baptized young people, then concludes that such consequence must nullify the possibility of "whole multitude choice." Well try this: "The saying pleased the whole multitude . . . and they chose" (Acts 6:4).

Mike graciously notes that I do not insist on all decisions of every nature being made by the congregation, but then argues as if I did. This is why he sees "false dichotomy." Without some congregational sharing in responsibility, I say, "The alternative is lordly hierarchy and dominated attenders." Yes, elders or business meetings that so operate are guilty. Mike says elders "can oversee a congregation without relegating decision making." Well, yes. But Scripturally? In fact, they cannot be *leaders* and *shepherds* and abdicate *all* decision making. But if they oversee as elders in the New Testament, there are decisions they will make in conjunction with the congregation. And Weldon's article well shows that actual choices were made by the congregation at large in some instances. Was that false dichotomy?

About generic authority for men meeting for business. Okay. My point was that there is specific authority for some congregational involvement. Why exclusively bind the former and prohibit the latter? Now, where is specific or generic authority for men's meetings to make *all* decisions for the congregation? Mike says that "oversight and leadership given to elders is withdrawn to the degree that there are limits in the decisions they can make." No, limits on decisions they can make does not withdraw their *leadership*. It *does* say something about what oversight is. It is not totalitarian. Can elders acceptably impose decisions to use instrumental music? Can they make *every* decision

for the congregation? Who the servants shall be? Are there then limits on their permitted decisions? Relegating some decisions defines the kind of rule they have. They don't have the kind of "rulers of the gentiles" have (Matt. 20:25-26). Though Mike recognizes that elders are not lords, his arguments tend otherwise.

Elders are not equivalent to the IBM board of directors. Elders are shepherds and watchmen, concerned with people's souls instead of running a business. The kind of rule they have is effected through the *leadership* the Holy Spirit insists they have proven themselves capable of, and then assigns to them. And even the IBM board is limited in power. Shareholders can bring issues before annual meetings and out vote the board, and they regularly vote on various issues. Nor does Congress illustrate Mike's contention. There are citizens initiatives for which California is famous, and the people decide on all sorts of issues including Constitutional Amendments. Mike's contentions make elders *more* lordly than Boards and Congress.

Elders as "government" (1 Cor. 12:28) does not tell us how elders operate. There are different ways of governing. There are kings, dictators, tyrants, and chairmen, anarchies, democracies, and republics. Perhaps the footnote to "governments" in the ASV is helpful when it says "wise counsels." All *this* passage proves about their government is that it is implemented by counsel. Others passages tell the flock to respect it. And couple that with the fact that elders are not to be self-willed. This tells us some kinds of government they must not employ. And Mike assumes that in this "government" the word translated "rule" applies only to elders. That is incorrect. Check the word rendered rule, first, and chief (Heb. 13:17; Lk. 22:26; Acts 15:22). It is the same word. Elders share this distinction with others in the congregation. "Rule" is not speaking of government by decree, or else elders must share the decree making.

Mike's arguments here do not let the church make any decisions. He is saying the church acts in the action of elders and men's business meetings. But when the apostles made their decision, the church's decision had not yet been made (Acts 6). Amazingly, what Mike is arguing is, if the apostles had chosen, it could be said that the multitude chose. Furthermore, a representative doing something may involve, but not exhaust, church action. Or it may not. The elders of Ephesus met Paul at Miletus. The church didn't. Using the example of the churches sending greeting to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:19), the churches acted before Paul. There had to be some church action for Paul to represent.

Mike would like a list of things the church decided in the New Testament. He has a list from me in private correspondence, and there is a list in my article under, "And More." If it would please him I will be glad to submit a future article expanding on the points made.

You can re-read his paragraph rejecting "assembly method." All that refers to is an action taken when all the congregation is together; for instance, to meet and deliver one to Satan. That was done by "assembly method" (1 Cor. 5:4). Assemblies acted at times in things beyond social worship. Must I reply to "assembly method" being un-biblical? If what is described is in the Bible, it is biblical. Now, while we are requiring an exact quote from an English translation in order to be biblical, let's find "Men's Business Meeting."

Note this faulty dilemma: Would "whole multitude choice" follow the decision of children who might be in the majority? Just apply his hypothetical at Jerusalem: "the whole multitude. . . chose." Does his dilemma undermine that fact? And my article has specific comments about the unscripturalness of the immature leading and majority rule. If it is argued that choosing servants was not done in assembly, how does one know that? And if the whole multitude may act and no way is specified, is not acting in assembly an authorized option where feasible? Stating that the congregation acted authorizes the congregation to act, not an exclusive method. While Mike's arguments seem to prohibit the congregation from making any decisions, if they do share in them his arguments would *bind* doing so *exclusively* by the "unassembled method." He asks incredulously: "May others take leadership and make persuasive recommendations when elders are present in the congregation?" The Pharisees did, others were involved in much questioning, and Peter, Paul, and Barnabas did, as well as James (Acts 15:5, 7, 12). And the appointed leadership with the help of other chief brethren brought what Mike objects to, decisions involving assembly consensus: "Then it seemed good to the apostles, and the elders, *with* the whole church (assembly), to choose men. . . and send" (Acts 15:22). I rest my case.

I do not call for democracy or for elders being only vote counters. I shudder at the thought. But like apostles, elders have a spiritual work that should not be neglected for all the mundane operations of a congregation. Their leadership, and decisions relative to leading, will determine course, and their watching will correct anything amiss. God bless us with such men. For more study I mention my booklet, *The Rule of Elders*. I also recommend the volume of *Truth Commentaries* by Clinton Hamilton on 1 Peter, both in the comments on 1 Peter 5:1-3, and the appendix on Elders, Bishops, or Pastors.

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# Final Words

Mike Willis

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I appreciate the good tone in which this discussion has occurred and commend brother Smelser's material to brethren. While there are things in his material to which I have objected, I concur with him in objecting to rule by elders or business meetings that is lordly, tyrannical, and dictatorial. On this we are agreed. I have but a few final comments to make in drawing this discussion to a conclusion.

1. The discussion closes without brother Smelser providing a criterion to use in determining which decisions an eldership or business meeting has a right to make. While he asserts that *some* decisions can be made by elders and business meetings, he objects to *all* decisions being made there. This leaves us with the unanswered question, "Which decisions do elders or business meetings have the right to make?" After all these pages, the question remains unanswered.

Brother Smelser said they do not have the right to decide to use instrumental music. They cannot because they are not lawgivers; only one is lawgiver (Jas. 4:12). However, he also stated that elders/business meetings should not choose "who the servants are" (par. 11). Please take note of this. Brother Smelser is arguing that elders do not have the right to choose who will be the local preacher or which preacher they may choose to support in another locality. He asserts that these decisions belong to the congregation as a whole. That is why I called attention to the fact that this discussion is about how local congregational decisions are made.

2. The IBM and Congress illustrations. The IBM and Congress illustrations were given, not to show *how* its officers ruled but to illustrate *representative* government. Brother Smelser's response was to cite the California initiatives. Did he not resort to "majority rule" in this response? In this response, decisions are made by majority rule, not by the elected representatives. This discussion is not about abusive elders but about how decisions are made in the local congregation.

3. Acts 15. Brother Smelser used the arguments of the

Pharisees and the speeches of Paul, Peter, Barnabas, and James to show how members of a local congregation could take part in making local church decisions, even in the presence of elders. The subject matter on which these men made comment was not "to choose men . . . and to send" but to decide whether or not men had to be circumcised in order to be saved. This was a matter of revelation, not human judgment. The text does not say that the local church members participated in that manner in the decision to send a letter and men with the conclusion reached at Jerusalem. That this seemed good to the whole church does not say that the "whole assembly" method of decision making was employed. Since brother Smelser says that the "whole church" sent, does that not imply that the women members and children members participated in the decision to send to the same extent as the men did? Whatever he can see that the men members did in the words "whole church," he must conclude that the women members and children members did as well, for there is nothing in the phrase "whole church" that can be used to distinguish what the men did from what the women and children did. This discussion is about how local churches make their decisions.

4. "Assembly method" decision making. Brother Smelser asserted, "To find harmony here with insistence that separated men make all decisions alone, just cannot be done" (par. 17, first article). Anything that allows all decisions to be made by "separated men" does not harmonize with the Scripture, according to brother Smelser. Scripturally qualified elders cannot meet outside the full church assembly to make all of the decisions for the church, brother Smelser argues. They cannot choose church servants (such as local preachers or who the church will support in other locations). (There is a significant difference between an eldership receiving the congregation's input before making a decision and in the congregation making the decision.) Some decisions have to be made in the assembly. Which decisions can elders or men's business meetings make outside the assembly? The question is crying for an answer? This discussion is about how local congregations make their decisions.



**Clinton Speaks to Gay Group,  
Shies Away from “Ellen” Star**

“Washington — In a nod to the budding political clout of the gay-rights movement, President Clinton on Saturday addressed a fund-raiser for the nation’s largest gay and lesbian group. ‘We have to broaden the imagination of America,’ he said.

“Clinton’s sold-out dinner speech to the Human Rights Campaign, which was greeted by a sustained standing ovation inside and pickets outside, made him the first sitting president to publicly address a gay and lesbian civil rights organization” (*The Indianapolis Star* [November 9, 1997], A4).

**Benefits of Religious Practice**

“Andrea Neal — Every Sunday morning, the routine is essentially the same: Wake up, make pancakes and get dressed for church, all the while hearing the kids complain, ‘Don’t we get a day to sleep in?’

“Knowing what Duke University researchers have found, I’d be foolish to change our pattern. In the October *International Journal of Psychiatry in*

*Medicine*, they report that those who attend weekly religious services have healthier immune systems than those who don’t.

“It’s the first study ever published . . . that has found an association between religious activity and immune functioning,’ says Dr. Harold Koenig, director of Duke’s Center for the Study of Religion/Spirituality and Health.

“. . . Immune systems aren’t the only things that function better when people regularly practice their faith.

“Last year, in an effort to influence political discussion of the role of religion in public life, the Heritage Foundation compiled all the studies it could find on religion’s link to health and social stability. The amount of research conducted over many years, and the overwhelmingly beneficial impact traced to religion, were amazing. For example:

“Regular church attendance is the most critical factor in marital stability, regardless of denomination or doctrinal teaching on divorce. A 1993

survey of 3,300 men found that those who switch partners most are those with no religious convictions. Similarly, the rate of cohabitation before marriage is seven times higher among people who seldom or never attend religious services, a significant finding since couples who live together before marriage experience higher divorce rates.

“Researchers at Johns Hopkins University have found cardiovascular disease significantly reduced by a lifetime of church attendance. Numerous other studies confirm that churchgoers live longer with lower rates of cirrhosis, emphysema and arteriosclerosis.

“Religious involvement greatly decreases drug use, delinquency, premarital sex and increases self-control for all age groups. In a 1985 study of girls, 9 to 17, less than 10 percent of those who attended religious services weekly reported drug or alcohol use, compared to 38 percent of the overall group” (*The Indianapolis Star* [November 6, 1997], A22).

**U.S. Abortion Rate Drops;  
Experts Credit Prevention  
Programs**

“Barbara Vobejda, *The Washington Post* — The rate at which American women received abortions dropped significantly in 1995, continuing a steady decline during the 1990s and putting the figure at its lowest level in two decades.

“The figures, released Thursday by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, show that the proportion of women of child-bearing age who obtained abortions dropped 5 percent over the previous year and 20 percent since 1980.

“But the study, and other research, suggests that the decline is not primarily driven by women choosing to proceed with unintended pregnancies.

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My contention is that the words of Scripture authorize elders to make decisions for the church. They are “overseers” (Acts 20:28), they qualify themselves for their work by “ruling” their family so that they can “rule” the church (1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17); they have oversight (1 Pet. 5:2). This separated group of men is divinely ordained of God to make decisions in the local church. To avoid “lording” it over the flock, they need to seek the input of those over whom

they have oversight and rule. But, after receiving the congregation’s input, the responsibility for making decisions falls, not on the men of the congregation in general, not on the women and children, but upon the elders. This discussion is about how local congregations make their decisions.

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6567 Kings Ct., Danville, Indiana 46122

"Instead, Americans — particularly teen-agers — are using contraceptives more effectively and avoiding pregnancy in the first place, experts said" (*The Indianapolis Star* [December 5, 1997], A1).

### **Emory Oks Gay Marriage Vows With Strict Campus Limitations**

"Associated Press, Atlanta — Methodist-affiliated Emory University will allow gay couples to say marriage or commitment vows in its chapels.

"But the new policy sidesteps a conflict with the United Methodist church by effectively excluding most of the school's homosexual community.

"As approved by the board of trustees, it requires that all such vows be taken before a religious leader from one of the 24 groups on campus, according to Emory chaplain Susan Henry-Crowe. Of those groups, she said, only the Reform-Jewish synagogue and the United Church of Christ perform such ceremonies" (*The Indianapolis Star* [November 29, 1997], B5).

### **The Two Covenants**

This is the name of a new thirteen lesson workbook written and published by Johnie Edwards, his two sons (C. Titus and Johnie Paul) and his grandson (John Isaac). In light of the recent teaching about "one covenant" that is used to justify unscriptural marriages, this workbook is very timely. The workbook can be ordered from Truth Bookstore (1-800-428-0121). The lessons include questions for students.

### **Pottery Shard Points to Temple**

"A potshard with an inscription of a receipt may contain the earliest extra biblical reference to Solomon's Temple in ancient Jerusalem.

"Top biblical scholars seem convinced of its authenticity, despite its unknown source. After surfacing on the antiquities market, the shard became part of the collection of London businessman Shlomo Moussaieff. The inscription is translated: 'Pursuant to the order to you of Ashyahu the king to give by the hand of Zecharyahu silver of Tarshish to the House (or Temple) of Yahweh. Three shekels.'

"Scholars date the inscription from the ninth century to the seventh century B.C., based on the early-Hebrew script that was common before the Babylonian exile.

Ashyahu is not known as one of the kings of Judah. University of Chicago scholar Dennis Pardee suggests the name could be Josiah, who ruled Judah from 640 to 609 B.C.

"Frank Moore Cross of Harvard and P. Kyle McCarter of Johns Hopkins believe the inscription is older, dating perhaps to the reign of King Joash, 835 to 796 B.C." (Gordon

Govier, *Christianity Today* [January 12, 1998], 60).

### **Poll Reports More People Believe in God's Existence**

"Washington — This Christmas season, the largest percentage of Americans in a decade profess a belief in God and the existence of miracles.

"A poll commissioned by the Pew Research Center, released Sunday, reported 71 percent of respondents say that they never doubt the existence of God. In 1987, the figure was 60 percent.

"The poll also found that 61 percent of Americans believe miracles come from the power of God — an increase of 14 percentage points from a decade ago.

"And 53 percent said prayer is important to daily life. In 1987, it was 41 percent" (*The Indianapolis Star* [December 22, 1997], A3).

### **Teen Drug Use Down Slightly**

"Teen drug use dropped slightly last year, the first decrease since 1992, according to a government report to be released Wednesday. The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse says nine percent of American teens used drugs in 1996, down from 10.9 percent in 1995, according to an administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"Last year's survey showed that drug use among 12-to-17 years-olds had more than doubled since 1992. That included sharp increases in teen use of LSD, cocaine and marijuana, with usage about the same across ethnic and economic groups. The new report indicates that marijuana use, which accounts for three-fourths of teen drug use, remains statistically unchanged after doubling between 1992 and 1995. Alcohol use among teens dropped from 21.1 percent in 1995 to 18.8 percent last year. Tobacco use remained flat at 18 percent, although use of smokeless tobacco dipped from 1.8 percent to 1.9 percent.

"There was some bad news as well. More teens tried heroin for the first time last year and the number of teens who viewed cocaine as risky dropped. Also, use of hallucinogens edged up. The official speculated that the drop in overall teen drug use might just be cyclical, given how high the rates had reached. The official generally credits private and public sector efforts as contributing to the decline, including the intense focus on hazards of marijuana use. (submitted by Art Adams, IARCCA report of 8/17/97).



## Field Reports



**Timothy R. Henderson, 2917 Foster St., Bossier City, LA 71112:** The elders here thought it would be good to send a note to let people know how things were going here at the Bossier Church of Christ. We had a great year in 1997 and are expecting greater things in 1998.

Our attendance has grown, we now have a total of 31 families with 54 members. The church here is such a wonderful group of people to work with, and we are trying to plan things for 1998 that will help the borders of the kingdom grow in this area.

In 1997 we had two meetings, one with my father Jerry Henderson, and one with Connie Adams. Both were very profitable for the congregation here. We also had a Vacation Bible School, out of which we were able to bring in a family that had been out of service to the Lord, and have since placed membership with us.

In 1998 we have planned two meetings, one again with my father the last full week in March, and the other with Bruce James and another Vacation Bible School.

If anyone is passing through the area and would like to visit with us, please feel free to call me at (318) 747-4308 or you may call me at home (318) 741-5144. You may also E-mail me at: [thender@aol.com](mailto:thender@aol.com). We are just off of 1-20 to the south.

Our times of worship are Sunday: 9:30 a.m. Bible Study (classes for all ages), 10:30 a.m. Worship, 6:00 p.m. Worship. We also meet on Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. Bible Study and worship.

**Roy S. Fudge, 1150 County Hwy. 45, Hayden, AL. 35079:** In the May 1 issue of *Guardian of Truth* my son Raymond had an article on "Work Horses." He told of my work as a gospel preacher. I would like to give an update on our situation.

We moved on June 1, 1997 to Blount County, Alabama. I had hoped to get weekly appointments to preach. That has not worked out. We are attending services with the Sugar Creek church. Since moving I have preached only four Sundays.

Since we had no regular income we applied for SSI. That began in November. We have no savings. At one time I had an IRA but hospitals and doctors took it all. Since we moved here my wife had emergency gall bladder surgery. The hospital bill was \$8232.00. She entered on Friday and came home the next day. That was in the Methodist hospital. Some charity group connected with the hospital paid that bill. The doctor's bill is still outstanding. It is \$3633.50. We have no way to pay it.

I dropped out of full time preaching because of a hearing problem. My nephew and his dad are in the hearing aid business in California. They gave me a pair of hearing aids for Christmas. They have made a great difference to me.

We have received a number of personal gifts from friends that have helped us meet our living expenses. One church has continued to send us \$250 a month. Our oldest son, Raymond, bought a house we now live in. Our youngest son, Kendall, helped with the down payment and pays our electric bill. We pay \$250 per month rent.

A few weeks ago my wife fell. No bones were broken but she still has some trouble with her back. Otherwise we are in good health.

It was my privilege to preach for 56 years that took me into twenty states. I also taught Bible classes for two years before I began preaching. To all our friends we would like to say God bless every one of you.

**C.J. Jenkins, 658 W. King St., St. Augustine, FL 32209:** I am a friend of brother Lionel Williams, the preacher at the church at 1459 W. 27th St., Jacksonville, Florida 32209. They are building a new worship place and could use some pews. If any congregation is getting new pews, please call brother Jenkins at 904-738-7014 or brother Williams at 904-768-9603. This will be a great blessing for them.

## Preacher Needed

**Trafalgar, Indiana:** The Spearsville Road Church of Christ is looking for a preacher to work with them. They have attendance in the 30s. Some outside support would be needed. If interested, contact Gene Warman, 6244 S. 500W, Trafalgar, IN 46181, 317-878-5969.

