

Renewal Through Humility

by Colin Anderson

Colin Anderson's sermon highlights the critical need for humility and adherence to biblical standards in church leadership for true renewal to occur.

Scripture: Titus 1:5

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Spiritual Humility"

Description

Colin Anderson preaches on the crucial need for qualified and willing elders in assemblies today, emphasizing the biblical requirement of plurality of elders and the detrimental effects of lacking true leadership. He challenges common excuses for not meeting the high standards set in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, urging a biblical approach of confession, self-assessment, and prayer for God's provision. Anderson warns against expedient solutions that deviate from scriptural principles, advocating for humility, dependence on God, and a commitment to upholding God's standards for church leadership.

Transcript

What is the greatest need among assemblies today? A variety of answers might be given to that question, but certainly one of them would be the subject of leadership, its form and quality.

We seem to be clear as to the form of leadership required by the New Testament. Plurality is the key word -- plurality of elders. We rightly condemn all substitutes in form. One man doing most of the preaching or having the final word in decisions affecting the church is a violation of scriptural principles -- a departure in form. But if, to our credit, we have not permitted substitutes in form, can the same be honestly said about quality?

True elders are at a premium today. Many assemblies do not have functioning elders. There are those who could, with more sacrifice, do the work but they will not; they have other priorities. Then there are those who are called elders but are disqualified by the quality control standards given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Few men are to be found who are both willing and able. This is very serious. Scores of assemblies are experiencing spiritual decline because of the lack of qualified leaders.

Common Excuses

Whenever we are convicted about something, our first instinct is to rationalize. "No one could be expected to satisfy all those requirements," we say. Why not? Did the apostles appoint men who did not meet their

own standards? That is to accuse them of hypocrisy.

"Well," someone else says, "in those days, things were a little different; business was not so demanding. It was easier to devote yourself to the things of the Lord." How so? Are we saying the Scriptures were written for first century Christians only?

Is it really true that the two passages to which we have referred are too exacting? Do you not think that a normal Christian ought to strive after these qualities? We believe that is why an elder must have them. He is to be an example to the flock, a model for them. They are called to imitate such leaders (1 Peter 5:3; Heb. 13:7).

"An elder must be . . ." Is that as demanding as it sounds? Yes, it is! How would you respond if someone said to you, "I know it says we 'must be born again,' but, failing that, surely God will be pleased if we do the best we can." Or suppose another said that, in spite of our Lord's clear statement that "the Son of Man must be lifted up," they thought the cross was not a necessity; God could have found some other way? Dare we downplay the strength of that same word "must" in Timothy and Titus?

Seeking a Way Out

Even if the leaders of a local congregation excuse their inability to function, they will soon sense that they cannot handle the situation in which they find themselves. Various expedients are then adopted. A present fad is to change the form. "We are too busy; we will call in a man to do this work. We will still hold to the plurality of elders, of course . . ."

Another way out of the dilemma is for current leaders to become more rigid and autocratic. It is easier and less costly to rule by edict rather than example. But either of these methods or any others lacking in scriptural warrant is doomed to failure. The trouble is, they seem to provide an immediate and practical solution. But, in the long term, the whole church leaves adherence to the principles of the New Testament behind, and expediency becomes the rule rather than obedience. What "works" wins every argument and decides every question.

Is there a more excellent way? We believe so. The writer has witnessed the spiritual reviving that takes place when what he now recommends is put in place.

A Biblical Approach

The first step is confession. It is not enough to make general statements of inadequacy. "I'm not worthy to be an elder; I am sure I do not measure up; I've got so much to learn myself . . .," etc. Be specific. Look honestly at the qualities expected of an elder. Some of those qualifications have to do with one's personal life: "temperate, prudent, respectable, not addicted to wine . . ." Others encompass his domestic life: "the husband of one wife . . . hospitable . . . manages his own household well . . . children under control . . ." Still others deal with inter-personal relationships: "not pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious." Business relationships are also concerned: "above reproach, free from the love of money . . ." One has to do with maturity: "not a new convert."

It is not a question of perfection, but the standards are high. A man might lose his temper in a situation. The question is, does he often do so? One of his five children might have special problems and be difficult to handle. What about the other four? We must remember God does not judge people by isolated incidents of failure or sin but does it seem to be a pattern? Is the elder-to-be characteristically at fault in

any of these important areas?

How about his ability to teach? You are right if you say he does not have to be a gifted Bible teacher, but can he handle the Word appropriately and helpfully in public and/or in private? Do people seek his help in the area of understanding and applying scriptural principles to their daily lives? Where present leaders find there is failure, they need to admit it -- first before God, then to their peers and, if need be, before the assembly. But no precipitous action should be taken without careful consultation.

In some cases, each member of the present oversight may discover they are not qualified to serve. They should be prepared to act as interim leaders until the Lord raises up or sends to the assembly those more qualified. But, the important thing is, there should be no pretense that they are elders. It would be better to be honest and drop the title rather than carry on with a spiritual sham.

The whole assembly should then be made aware of the stand these men have taken and urged to join them in earnest and persistent prayer that the Lord would provide for this need in His flock. Such a step calls for great humility; but will leave room for God to work; and the congregation will be taught that the Head of the Church is still responsive to the needs of His Body when its members genuinely cry to Him. This spirit of self-humility and dependence upon the Lord is most healthful for the church, and when the Lord provides (either by strengthening and enabling some of the present leaders to overcome their deficiencies or by bringing in experienced help from the outside) then the congregation at large will see this to be the work of the Lord and thereby be encouraged to respect and submit to the elders the Lord has provided.

Let us not lower God's standards to accommodate our present condition. Rather let us give them their full force and humble ourselves before God, asking for His mercy and grace. The Word of God then guarantees that true renewal will take place.

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

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