

Bristol Conference 1977-11 Discussion on Elders

by Stan Ford

The sermon emphasizes the importance of elders in the church, their qualifications, and their role in serving the Lord and caring for the flock.

Duration: 57:51

Scripture: Acts 20:17

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Restoring Sinners"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not giving up on sinners who have strayed from the faith. He encourages believers to continue reaching out and forgiving those who have gone astray, just as God does. The speaker also discusses the role of elders in the church, highlighting the independence of each local church and the need for shepherds to have a heart of compassion and tears for their flock. He emphasizes the importance of teaching publicly and from house to house, emphasizing that the work of an elder extends beyond the walls of the church building.

Transcript

This is a true saying. If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work. The bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy, a filthy looker, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous, one that ruled as well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Thank you very much. It was suggested that we have a brief review as to the work of the elders, a subject we took up yesterday.

We'll ask our brother Ford to do it. Yesterday we had a number of questions, but believe it or not, only two came from the audience. Today we have some more, but I wish that you would... If you... Does anybody else have any questions written out? If not, if you would raise your hand, and if you want a card, we'll provide a card for you, and then we'll give you opportunity during the discussion.

Brother Ford. Thank you. I wonder if we could just make reference also to that 20th chapter of Acts, which has been referred to on so many occasions.

I wonder if I may pass a little comment. A comment... I made a similar comment last week, and I think that it does bear just consideration. You see, I don't believe the Lord Jesus ever asked us to do what he himself has not done.

I do not believe the apostle Paul ever exhorted the elders of a church to do what he, in sowing the seed of that church, also did. And the 20th chapter of Acts, he calls for the elders of the church. Do you remember the elders in Ephesus? And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus... By the way, this microphone is rebounding, by the way.

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church, and when they would come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many fears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews, and oh, I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house. Remember, he is talking to those elders in Ephesus. He is reminding them and instructing them.

And I would make this suggestion to your consideration, that here are the marks of a man who, as a shepherd of the flock, cares for those that are in the church. These, surely, are the marks of any man who seeks to serve God and serve God's people in the capacity of an elder. First, he served the Lord.

Well, he saw that he served the church. Remember, he spoke of the care of all the churches when he writes his second letter to the church at Corinth. But, first of all, he saw that he was serving the Lord.

Now brethren, when we see this, this makes it possible for us even to serve some that don't want to be served. It can be very difficult as an elder of the church to seek to care for someone who doesn't want to be cared for, as well as it's difficult to feed someone who doesn't want to be fed. But we're doing this for the Lord, and I think that's important to remember.

And he served the Lord with all humility of mind. And I think that's lovely. Not just humility, but humility of mind.

Not thinking more of himself than he ought. Not being puffed up. Not saying, I'm the elder of the church, or I'm the apostle of war.

You will notice he did it with many fears. Many temptations came his way. I think the heart of an elder is seen in those fears.

I think the heart of a shepherd in the flock is seen in those fears. I wonder how many of us, when I speak from my own heart, not as an elder, but as one that labours among God's people, I wonder how many times we've been shepherds. Or when things had a difficult one to come along, I wonder how many times we've sat back and said, Well, I told them what to do and that's it.

Oh no. He lifts all those temptations. He turned back.

Those temptations may be not to serve as well as he ought. He served the Lord with fear. But maybe this is one of the marks of an elder.

And then he goes further and he says he taught publicly. He said, I have shown you and I have taught you publicly. And I've done it also from hand to hand.

The work of an elder is not shut up to the four walls of a gospel assembly building. The work of an elder is the visiting of the home, the teaching of the flock, the caring for the people, wherever they're at. And then it seems to me he goes further, and he dares to say this.

Verse 24, he says that when problems come, none of these things have moved me. Neither have I counted my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy. And then verse 27, and I have not shunned to declare unto you all the countenances of God.

If we thought a little of the work and the qualifications of an elder, and we think a little of the work, brethren I don't know about you, but I just have to cry to God, oh God, raise up elders among God's people. Raise up men who are willing to pay the price of caring for the flock. Caring for the flock.

A shepherd for the flock. Nothing more really than that. In connection with the work of an elder, I believe a verbal question was passed on to you by the board to the effect that, that someone is, can we just, can I go down just a little? If someone has gotten away from the Lord, I think the question was raised somewhat like this.

Should the elder wait till that person comes forward for restoration? Is that the idea? This was the question. The question was put, I can't remember it word for word, Mark, but the question that was put to me by someone as we were coming in was that if someone has got away from the Lord, maybe has served the Lord and served him well, but has got away from the Lord, has the elder to wait for that person to come and ask for fellowship again among God's people? Or is it the work of the elder to go after that person who's gone away? I think that the question, the answer is really itself. The answer is itself by this time when we have said an elder.

And we were reminded yesterday by Mr. Phillips that an elder is a shepherd. What was it, Mr. Sankey used to sing, None of the ransom ever knew, How deep were the waters crossed, Or how dark was the night that the Lord passed through, Ere he hanged the sheep of the cross. Can you imagine the Lord Jesus saying, Look, I'm not going to go after the sinner.

I'm going to let them come after me. May I please say what I think you've heard me say? All the questions I get asked among undergraduates when I conduct the readings in Cambridge, of all the questions I get asked, right at the top of the list is this one. What is the difference between the Christian faith and our faith? They may be the followers of Islam, they may be the followers of the Hindu religions or many other religions.

What is the difference between the Christian faith and all others? And there's one difference. There's one difference. And it's this.

It is this difference between the Christian faith and all other faiths. Every other faith, you name it, and I will quote from their holy writings, all other faiths tell us that the sinner has to seek after God. The Christian faith is the only faith that tells us that God came to seek after the sinner.

Now if its foundation is in the fact that God seeks after the sinner, don't you think that if that sinner becomes, by sovereign grace, a saint, and his heart grows cold, do you think God stops looking? Do you think we ought to stop looking? Oh brethren, if there's someone who's gone astray, let's go after them.

How many times forgive? Seven times? No, the Lord said seventy times seven. And please, that was in one day.

One day! Seventy times seven. Woo! No. Please.

Oh it's really, I can carry on. Don't we have a beautiful example of that in the case of John Mark? When he quit, when they got over to the mainland of Asia and things got tough, and his uncle Barnabas was beginning to take second place to the apostle Paul, and John Mark went back home to his mother. And it was because of such a very serious split between these two choice servants of the Lord, they disagreed very, very hotly as to whether or not they should take John Mark the second time.

Barnabas took John Mark under his wing, and he shepherded him. So much so that later on Paul himself could actually say that John Mark was possible for the ministry, the very area in which he failed. He failed as a minister.

And I think here we have a little illustration of the shepherd heart in action in the case of Barnabas. Going after John Mark and saying, well look, you failed once but you're not through. You come with me.

I think pursuing that, I think it's beautiful that there was a real restoration. Had there not been a real restoration, the Spirit of God would never have selected Mark to write the Gospel of Mark, of God's perfect servant. Very delightful.

You know, the work of the elder goes behind, I think, even the restoration of an elder, is he should have what we call discernment. And if there is discernment, then those who are caring for the sheep will sense when there's just a little cooling off in affection towards Christ when one is wandering away, and maybe restoration will be necessary in that sense. And we were calling attention last week, someone did, to Eli.

Eli was old and his eyes were dim. He couldn't see. He lacked discernment.

What did he fail to discern? His sons were vile and he restrained them not. Now, if Eli had discernment and restrained his sons, he may have saved a lot of grief in his son's life as well as his own life. I wish one of these brethren would speak up maybe a little to this point of what we call discernment.

Any thoughts on that, brethren? I think it comes to the very center that the elder himself must be in the position to be able to discern. He must have a knowledge of the Word of God and must be skilled in its handling. I think Titus has very much, at least Paul through Titus, has very much along that line to bring forth.

You cannot discern that someone's going astray unless you have a knowledge of the Word of God and of things that will lead people astray. In connection with the verses that were read from 1 Timothy 3, let's just go back into the second chapter just for a moment. I think we get the basis of everything in the second chapter.

He's not speaking about elders. He's speaking about Christian men and Christian women in the congregation itself. And he says concerning the men, I think there we get the conduct of the whole congregation.

The conduct of the congregation is governed by the Word of God as we've got here. It makes the work of the elder a great deal easier and more pleasant. It might be well at this point, even before we take up the

qualifications of an elder, to take up some of the questions that have been handed in so that we don't leave them to the very end.

I asked a pastor, and they've got the denomination, and I think it's wise, brethren and sisters, to leave out the names of denominations and so forth because we want to deal in general and we don't want to aim at anybody. I asked the pastor, He said, I believe he has a point since the Bible recognizes both elders and deacons. It is just as wrong for a so-called denominational church not to recognize elders as it is for an assembly not to recognize deacons.

Yet I've been to several assemblies where one could name elders but not deacons simply because they are not recognized. Why are some assemblies inconsistent in recognizing elders but not deacons? Our main subject this week is elders, but Mr. Ford always has the answers. I don't have the answer on this one, apart from my comment about it, really.

I think, first of all, that we have to remember exactly what a deacon is. There is a lot of very, very weak thinking, I must say. Some imagine that a deacon is an unqualified elder, an apprentice as an elder, a man who cares for the fabric of the church and sort of sweeps the hall out a bit and does up the odd jobs that have to be done.

At least, the word deacon is simply fervent, isn't it? A fervent deacon. The scripture that's generally referred to, of course, is the Great Sixth Chapter of Acts, when there arose the murmurings concerning the care of widows and how the apostles, not the elders, ladies, not the elders, but the apostles were so busy at that time in caring for the spiritual need, in preaching the word, that they didn't have time to do the physical work for caring. And so men were appointed to do that particular job, and they were servants of the church.

Amongst them was Stephen, who we never even read of, waited on the church. Amongst them was Philip, who never waited, who never waited on those things, who became the greatest preacher of the early church, who went down to Samaria and made the whole city glad, who brought such blessing in the proclamation of the word. So let us remember that a deacon is a servant of the church.

He's not just a man who is an unqualified elder. Qualification is actually given for a deacon, it seems to me, or as high as for an elder, and also, if you accept the word in Timothy as the wife of the deacon I know Mr. Darby translates it as women and not wives, but if you accept that as the wife, then the qualifications for a deacon's wife are hardly the qualifications of someone who sweeps out the hall, who washes the windows, who does our job. He's a servant of the church, and that servant of the church, I believe I do the work of a deacon.

I may do the work of an evangelist, but I serve the church. I serve the church. And so when sometimes it's pointed out that generally in our assembly life we don't have a diaconate, a diaconate, we do accept servants of the church.

That's an interesting verse that they that abuse the office of a deacon well purchase for themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus. And as Brother Stan has pointed out, of course, Philip and Stephen exemplify that principle. They were set apart to be, in a special sense, servants of the Jerusalem church, but the two of them, one became the first great missionary of the church and the other the first great martyr of the church.

And they both of them purchased a good degree and great boldness in the faith. I think it's very interesting to remember the qualifications of those men in Acts 6. They were to be of good report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom. And because those men took up that service of the church, great blessing followed because the apostles said, if you remember the scripture, we will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

When they began to minister the word, we read that the word of God increased, the number of the disciples was multiplied at Pentecost, this attitude of being a Scotsman, I like multiplication rather, the number of the disciples was multiplied. And then something else, the opposition melted away. A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

So when you've got things in the right context, why, great blessing follows as it did in that early church. You would agree, though, that while the qualifications of the church and the rites of the church are to have bold faith in that area, you don't do that because you have to keep to the rules of the church. It could be that that is not necessarily a qualification for the ministry.

Someone does have to look after a lot of business matters. You put on a recent speech in the hall, but aren't there many other major responsibilities that would require another group of men and women to help? I think what we do is clear that up, but I'm all in agreement. There is a difference in their work, isn't there? Raise your voice.

If you just stand up, then we can hear you, Brother O'Donaldson. That's the word that's used. The word that's used is he's a servant of the church.

You noticed how I tried to dodge the question, didn't you? Let me please, in real love, and I believe that you know me well enough to know that that's just how I would say it. Let me just say this. I said it last week, and I think it's important for us to remember that the Word of God leaves us in no doubt of the independence of the local church.

That Christ walked between seven golden candlesticks, and not the seven branch candlesticks. Each church was an individual church. Its purpose was to shine its light on Christ, so everyone could see Christ.

But there was no link between one church and another. The only link was that Christ was in the center, and he fed the oil, he trained the whip, and he kept the light burning. Now, I think that's an important question.

And I am very nervous that somehow or the other, something that we may say, you will take back and say, well now, the brethren said it, and so that's how it is. I believe in the independence of the local church, that the elders of the local church are responsible for the government of that church and for the things that happen there. If in your church you feel that there should be a company of brethren who would care for the physical side of the church, that's your responsibility before God.

I would find it very difficult to translate that into the description that's given us of deacons in the epistles of the Timothy's and the epistles of Titus. I would find it very difficult to translate that even into the description that's given of the servants of the Lord in caring for the needs of those in Jerusalem, the widows that arose. I believe that the qualification of a deacon is a spiritual qualification.

I believe that it's a qualification that is so spiritual that when you compare it with the elder, it's almost exactly the same. And I think the work of the servant, let's forget the word deacon, because you see, it is a

little bit like with Episcopalians when you talk of bishops. They immediately begin to conjure up in their minds what they have been taught an Episcopalian bishop is.

And over here, where in many of the denominational churches the deacons are real and vital people, we conjure up that this is what a deacon is. Now let's look and see what the Bible deacon is. Let's turn, please, and see what a Bible deacon is.

See what it says. Verse 8 of the third chapter of 1 Luke. Likewise, must the deacon be gray? Is that the qualification of someone who... Please, if I say, tweet back the whole world, please, Dick, I'm not speaking it in a disparaging... It's the best way of, you know, doing a physical work.

A deacon must be gray, and not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy, as thinks filthy Luker, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved. And let them use the office of a deacon being found blameless.

Even so, my fair wife, in fairness to you, I must say this, that there have been, that there have been by scholars, godly scholars of every school of law, there has been some difference of opinion here. It runs in actual fact, it runs about equal. Mr. Williams, wasn't it, of Moody, that man that gave the Moody translation? Was Williams by what they said? He's the only man I know who translates this word, deaconess.

No, he's the only man who translates it. But there is half and half that translates it, wives, and the other half would translate it, women, where they say that what you're talking about here are women workers in the church. Now, I'll authorise as wives, see, I am an authoriser.

But if it is wives, and I do contend there is academic difficulty here, if it is wives, then we must say this, that the qualification of the deacon's wife, I mean, it's just tremendous. Just tremendous. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, even so must their wives be great, not slanderous, sober, faithful in all things.

Let the deacons be the husband of one wife, not ruling their children their own house well, for they that have used the office of the deacon will purchase for themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. I would have thought that all those qualifications are spiritual qualities, and that the only difference is not in knowledge. And yet, it does speak of improving themselves before they're accepted as deacons.

Do you see the difficulty I'm taking here? Do you see the difficulty I'm taking here? I think that the word deacon is the word that suits the servants of the church, and these qualifications, anyone who goes out and bears the stamp of your church, someone comes to you and says, would you preach in our assembly tonight? Now, don't you forget, you not only go out to preach in that other meeting, but you go on behalf of the meeting you come from. You're a servant of that church. That church takes that presence.

I don't mean that necessarily in terms of the meal, but the presence. Serving the table would indicate a work somewhat different than it does all along. Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes.

I think this is so. A servant of the church can wait on table. Would I want to exercise this, please? Please, I know I'm not.

I'm trying to be quite French. I'm trying not to tread on corn. I mean, that's what I'm trying to do, and I find that difficult, you know, with size 13 really.

It's a job. I'm trying not to tread on corn. I'm trying not to say something that you will go back and say Sam Ford said this.

I'm not concerned with what Sam Ford says. I'm concerned with what the Bible says. What I'm trying to emphasize is that while I believe the work of the deacon is preparing on table, it's not that alone.

It's not that alone. It's not a company of people who have said, no, your job is to do the physical work. And you will not forget, will you? Yes.

You will not forget that when they made the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, they didn't send it to deacons. They sent it to the elders of Israel. So the elders have a little bit of the physical side to do as well.

Please, I thank you. I have a question. No.

I'm not making saints. I think if I could make the suggestion, it might be interesting if some of us could get hold of Vine and Hoist's Bishop and Deacon. It is dealt with in a scholarly way.

I think you would see then that the academic problem behind it is rather severe. What I am saying, please, is that I do accept that there are men who are servants of the church as distinct from men who are bishops in the church. I do not believe that those servants of the church, those deacons of the church, while they're recognized, I do not believe that they are a company who are limited to the cutting of the grass and the washing of the windows and the sweeping of the hall and the tearing of the fabric.

I believe that their work is bigger than that. I believe it is a spiritual work as well. A spiritual work as well.

You see, I don't believe that a person has to be an elder to care for the flock. I believe we can care for the flock without being an elder. I believe that we can do a work in ministering for God to his people without being a deacon as well, just a saint.

This is our job, isn't it? Didn't I say this morning, we're like, didn't I say yesterday, we're Saul? So that will affect, won't it? Not one of you better, please, the priesthood of all believers, not only holy priests, but loyal priests. Holy priests towards God, loyal priests towards the world. I think I'm on an ideology balance.

But, please, I fear that we limit the work of a deacon, the work of a servant of the Lord, if we just say that those deacons, their work is, well, the coming of the Lord. Please, brethren, I've done what I promised you I wouldn't do and I didn't want to do it. I was like, no, no, wait a minute, the brethren in the second row had his hand up first and then the third row.

Whether it is a question of recognition, do you feel that it's possible that many, quote-unquote, that are designated as elders are really serving some of them in the capacity of a deacon? And yet we're identifying them as an elder, an elder of the assembly, yet we have both offices of profuse love within the local assembly. We have both offices of profuse love within the local assembly. But we, as saints, feel to recognize them.

Now, I know that there are some recognizing them. Could I just say this, if I may? When I go to my home assembly, please, if I walked in, there it is, if I walked in and I saw set up in lights, a couple of bulbs have gone out, I wouldn't barge in and say, hey, brethren, some lights are out. I'd go in and look for some bulbs and put them up.

If someone came into our meeting and they'd never been in before, I wouldn't look around and say, where are the elders who want to speak to these folks? I'd go up and speak to them. If I saw that a work needed to be done, I wouldn't say, now, I'm a preacher, I'm a preacher. I don't think any decent elder would ever refrain from doing even manual work of his business.

Yes. I'm a little bit jesty. I promise I will.

I don't want anyone to recognize me. I just want to get in and do a job. In the second or third row there, brother.

I think I've heard the answer, but I'm not sure I want to get into it right now. Should the elected officials as an office as well as an office Is it a question of recognizing it as an office or is it a question of recognizing the work that should be done? I don't believe there's anything official in this. Is there a reason? Speak up, because we can't... You say you're ashamed.

I'm not ashamed to name them. You've seen some of my own students. It's a shame to say, oh, it's a shame to over-commission them.

That's what it is. You've got, sir, at least two instances that I know of where the Apostle Paul said in the church that says, appoint me. You've got qualifications.

You've got... If you have any instructions, you need to have me. Whether you have the first or not, I believe they're there, whether recognized or officially. I believe in almost every assembly, you've got deacons and you've got elders.

People say we don't have any elders. I think there are very few congregations, if any, where the Lord has left his people without someone to do some shepherd care. Very often it's being done without anybody, sometimes without people knowing it.

There's a great variety of opinion among the assemblies. I think there's one thing we want to be very careful of today, that we don't come to some conclusion and say, people go back and say, well, now, this is it. I believe each assembly is responsive.

As Brother Ford said, each assembly is directly responsible to the Lord to carry out what they see from his word. Some places would put the names up on the board. We had this last week.

They put them up on the board so everybody could know. They were sorry they put them up on the board because they had problems afterwards. There are places where they're recognized.

If you go in, you know right away. If you're there very long, you know who the deacons are and who the elders are. I think it's up to the local congregation for its own spiritual well-being and edification to decide just how they're going to handle it.

We can discuss it, but I don't think we can... No, you don't, Brother. I think it's important to remember that the sixth chapter of Acts is before the Apostle Paul was converted and the Apostle Paul was the apostle of the Church. It was to him that the Spirit of God gave the doctrines of the New Testament Church.

I'm not saying there was no Church until the Apostle Paul came. That's not true. The Church had its birth in Pentecost.

But let's remember that the Apostle Paul is the apostle of the Church. The Scripture says, he said quite frankly and led on the Spirit of God that the Lord delivered unto him the counsels of the Church. And I think what you have said is an important point to remember.

But let's remember the independence of the local congregation. The elders feel that they're in the company of folks. We have, in my own meeting at home, we have a company of brethren who care for the fabric.

But they're not for Jesus. We don't want Jesus. Brother? Are there any other questions before we move on to the back? Yes.

Keep your voice up. But is it not that the Revolutionary Church is made up of bishops and deacons? I know this is an ironic quote. It makes it sound good, though.

So, why do we have reported by the Holy Spirit of God in 1 Timothy chapter 3 of 1 Timothy? Why do we have the third chapter? Is that a fair question? I don't understand the question. I don't understand the question. Well, verse 1 says that there is Jesus Christ, and verse 10 says that the apostles of Jesus say that Christ, according to the Word, is a deacons and servants made up of elders and deacons.

Elders and servants? Yes. I think we're playing on the word deacon. I think we have a conjured up feeling in our mind as to what a deacon is.

A deacon is not just a monk. It doesn't say there, does it? Can you give me one verse in the qualifications of a deacon that here is a man whose qualification makes him fit to do the manual side of assembly work? Is that what it says? I don't think this would ever be there. These spiritual qualifications would never be there if that were true.

Now, I believe that every man in the assembly should strive for godliness, because at the end of this chapter, it says that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God. Oh, yeah. Most definitely.

But that was to do the task about the job. The job about the whole of it. When he said the fabric, he didn't mean the curtains.

He meant the whole building. That's just an old English word, you know. We'll forgive him for that.

Oh, I'm afraid of it. Yes, I'm utterly afraid of it. Tell us why.

Well, because so much is associated with it that it's not scriptural. Here, I read these words, words that we have read, and the qualifications of a deacon are spiritual qualifications. Spiritual qualifications.

Now, the care of the fabric of a building, the business side of it, I believe that if you've got a man in your assembly who is a who is what we would call an estate agent, what you'd call a real estate man, and you are thinking, indeed, of maybe building another building somewhere else, you would be utterly foolish not to bring that man on to do the work for making some provision. He may not have spiritual qualifications, but he has intellectual ability and qualifications which would enable him to do that work. I believe that that particular work is the type of work that my own assembly, we have a company of brethren who just care for the fabric of the church.

But it's not a spiritual qualification. But I would be recognized in my own assembly, I would be recognized, I believe, as a deacon. As a deacon.

When certain matters arise in our assembly, my brethren call me in. I'm not an elf. I wouldn't go on the oath.

I don't believe I have a faith on elves. But they would call me in for my advice. I believe, like Philip was appointed to wait on tables, never really did, but he went down into Samaria, and he so preached the gospel that revival broke out in Samaria, and the whole city was made glad.

I believe there are brethren here that are doing the service of the church. They are servants of the church. But, please, I said right at the beginning that there would be... I'd like to ask you, Brother, and without putting you on the spot, give us your thoughts, because it may clear up some of the things.

Give us your own personal thoughts as to what a deacon or a servant is in view of 1 Timothy 3, if you prefer it to. I would like to ask you, Brother, that the office is spiritual as well as good in myself. Well, I would be interested what scripture you would give me for doing the odd jobs around.

Acts 6, verse 2. Would you agree that that was before the Apostle Paul was converted, and before the great treaties of the Christian church were given, or not? Yes, they used to be free. Oh, yes, yes. Before prayer.

These were not elders that had to be free. These were apostles. Please, Dick, I'm not trying to win any argument.

The last thing in the world is that I would want to argue. The last thing in the world I think, Brother Ford, part of this problem hinges on this fact. It's not just the work, but it's of official recognition in some way.

And I believe that you've got to leave that to the individual congregation. I really do. We're not saying that they shouldn't be recognized for anything else.

But I think Brother Ford has brought out a very important facet in connection with the work of the deacon. When you read over these spiritual qualifications, they're there because he's got a spiritual work. Now, can we leave it there, and can we, when we go, leave that part of it there, and when we go home... For the moment, I'm sure we won't leave it there.

Oh, no. But when we go home, don't say the brethren decided this. We didn't decide anything.

Brethren and sisters, we're exploring in a very friendly way the word of God. And we've got to come back to the book and back to the book. And I like what a dear friend of mine said.

We can disagree without being disagreeable. I'm glad you said that. We're going in a little different direction.

I've got two questions, and this came up last week. Under qualifications of an elder, there's a reference to the husband of one wife. Does this, do you believe, have reference to the elder being a practitioner of monogamy as opposed to polygamy? Or does this mean that a divorced, remarried man should not be an elder? Then I have another one here.

Is a man qualified to be an elder if he was married twice before he was saved? Does God recognize both marriages or the one now? What does, I think, if we get behind this, what does this mean? The husband of one wife and having his household in subjection with all gravity. It ties them together. Of course, there's disagreement, again, amongst brethren as to whether or not the husband of one wife means that he just has one wife now.

We have to remember that polygamy was practiced in the Old Testament with divine sanction. The law of Moses allowed polygamy. It didn't, God never really encouraged polygamy, but he legislated for it in the law of Moses.

In the Christian Church, those who want to be an elder, one of the qualifications is that they have to be the husband of one wife, which obviously means that they haven't got half a dozen. Whether it means, as some would go on to argue, that if a man was married and then widowed, then married again, he has disqualified himself for being an elder because he's had two wives. I think that's going too far, although there are some who would maintain that.

It would certainly seem that the words are to be taken at their face value, that if a man is an elder in the assembly, he has to be a married man, because how else can he prove himself apart from being a married man in this particular capacity? The question of whether or not a divorcee can be an elder raises a whole host of other questions. I think, as our brother said in connection to this, the husband of one wife, as he said, we must remember that there was polygamy. Let's take a place like Corinth.

And I think it's an interesting assumption, and that's all I'm going to make. First of all, if the husband of one wife, if he had two or three wives, he could not be an elder, but it seems by that very fact that he was able to participate of the communion. I'm sorry, take what did you say? Participate of the communion.

No, no, but you said let's take the city. Like Corinth. Oh.

What did you think I said? But you said Corinth. Oh! The wicked fleeeth when no man pursueth. It's all right.

No, you can understand what Corinth was like. And he said the husband of one wife. Now, I think it's a fair assumption that they were remembering the Lord.

They were in the congregation. This happened in their unconverted days. But they were disqualified from that public service as an elder.

Now, how do you feel about that, Brother Ford? I'd rather really have no comment about it. Well, I don't want to throw the wrong idea, that's all. I think that in its context, it was polygamy.

In its context, it was polygamy. I personally am very much given that if a person is divorced then that they are not permitted to be on another side. That is my personal.

But I believe in the independence of the local church. I think that's one of the things, Brother if I could say. It's one of the things that I feel very difficult in answering, very difficult, because there are conditions, there are local problems, there are family problems that I know nothing about, and I wouldn't make a statement that someone would go and say, Stanford said so-and-so.

I don't know the particular individual problem. My personal feeling, and a very strong one, is that divorce, of course, is wrong in any way. Thank you.

He goes on to say he has to rule his family. I know that. That's where he gets his experience.

I have seen some unmarried men who have a family, sisters. I wonder whether Lazarus was an unmarried man, cared for Mary and Martha. Maybe he could get a little experience along that line.

I think that it doesn't bar unmarried men from being an elder. Yes, Brother. As a point of view, I'd like to give you a little suggestion, and I won't tell you what our answer was.

This matter of divorce and remarriage and all that area is a very serious one, and becoming more and more serious. We faced it in our assembly some time ago, and we got not just the elders, we got all of the brethren together, and we discussed the matter back and forth from the Word of God. And after discussing it a number of times, we came to a conclusion from the Word of God as far as our assembly was concerned, and we arrived at a decision for the assembly, and it was completely unanimous and harmonious.

I'm not telling you what the decision was. I think I'd be entirely wrong, because we're in an individual lampstand, so to speak, and we're responsible to the Lord. Maybe we'll change our minds someday, I don't know.

But we arrived at what I call an assembly position in the light of the Word of God, and it was not hurried. And I think sometimes you have to do that. Now, our time is about... Now, Barbara... What is it, Mr. Anderson? Howdy.

Well, you see, I set mine up to finish meantime, and I... You'll be right then, Brother. Let us... Are there any other questions, quickly? How far should elders go in counseling extremely difficult cases of mental stress and depression? How much time should be given to difficult marital situations that seem to take away so much of an elder's time from others? I think it's a very difficult question to answer on the face of it, how much time. I think, again, this depends on a local situation.

People have to be born long and carried long. We had a brother here that spoke last week for us. Remember his name? What was that chap's name? What psychiatry? George Simon.

George Simon. And he said something, and then Dr. Best reinforced it afterwards that the psychiatrists have just really blown it. They're all wrong.

It's not scientific. It's not medical. It's not anything else.

And NBC had a documentary on it, and I think we want to be careful from that angle. But it's also true that, and I'm not a medical man, but it's also true with mental depression that sometimes there are physical characteristics that affect it. I think that this is something that's up to the elders themselves to weigh the particular case.

And how much time they should give, I don't know. Brethren and sisters, if we've learned anything today, we've learned the desperate responsibility resting on all our shoulders to pray for our elders. The desperate need for it.

I wonder if we could, please. I wonder if we could just ask a little question. Is there anyone in the group here who, before God, would answer this? Would say that you spend an hour a week praying for the elders of your parish? Now, in 24 hours in a day and 7 days in a week, is there anyone here, by the raising of their hand, would say, and please, before the Lord, would say that I spend an hour a week praying for the elders of our parish? Is there anyone? I think no.

You see, this matter of mental depression. Mental depression doesn't suddenly burst on a person, does it? The matter of the breakup of marriage, and please, I want to talk of this tenderly. Tenderly.

The matter of breakup of marriage, it doesn't happen all at once. It doesn't suddenly burst. And if there are elders caring for the sheep, they'll see funds, won't they? They'll suddenly see that maybe there are a young couple in their meeting and there are difficulties to write and at least not only young couples, older couples.

Older couples. Tragedy to me is that for many breakup of marriages have older couples. And we need to pray for the elders.

It isn't a matter of going when the thing suddenly has said, woo! But it's a matter of thankfully helping prior to that, isn't it? We need to pray for our elders. And could I say something else and it gets a little bit onto another subject that I'm sure maybe we'll be dealing with tomorrow. We need to pray for the sisters in the meeting, the older sisters who care for the younger ones.

We need to do that. We need to pray and pray desperately and I think we have seen and did you notice something? Did you notice something? I didn't put my hand up when I asked about that hour of prayer for the elders. Did you notice that? If I've been convicted during the past few days it's been of this.

In little time I've prayed for the elders of Athens. The most important brethren in the meeting. And if I may link it also with the servants of the church as well.

All who serve the church. All who serve the church. Whether it be the PVs, the decanesses of the church or whether it be the brethren who are working as sermons deacons in the church.

Oh how we need to pray. We've never prayed before. And I don't believe God's going to put his hand on us and bless us as once he did.

As once he did. And he did. Do you know where I live? I live within a radius of five miles of my home.

There are thirteen assemblies. God has blessed us over the years. He has blessed us.

I don't know because when most of these assemblies came into being I wasn't saying. I don't know how much they prayed for their elders. I know this.

That maybe if we'll get down and pray for our elders a little bit more. And when I say elders I'm speaking of the whole of those that care for us. They face problems and difficulties and we've seen that even the most knowledgeable of us, sometimes on points that we don't always say amen to everything that the other brother says when we go on this gathering saying Lord I want my assembly, the fellowship with which I am connected, I want it to burn for me.

I want it to be on fire for me. And Lord I'll do my best to pray for those that care for us. Watch over us.

For those that minister to us. For those that serve us. We want our church to be a local representative of the body universal with everyone in his place doing what God wants them to do.

I would like to say a hearty amen to our brother's comment in regards to prayer. What is our divine resource is it to get together and formulate some new plans and new programs? It is not. And I just want to refer to two verses and then we'll ask our brother Ford to close with prayer.

Remember in Matthew 6 the Lord tells the disciples to enter into the closet and pray. It's very interesting when you come over to Luke's gospel, chapter 12, I believe it's verse 24. He said the ravens have neither storehouse nor barn.

And the word for storehouse there in connection with the ravens is exactly the same word as for closet. And I think it's very, very beautiful. It was written up in one of our calendars not too long ago.

Our divine storehouse, our resources are in our prayer closet and we don't believe it. And I believe brethren and sisters that if we wait more on God instead of forcing or pushing an issue God will come in in great blessing. And before you dismantle before you close tomorrow we're going to zero in a little bit on what our brother suggested.

The work of the sisters in connection with the family life, elders, deacons, and all the rest. And please write questions. Somebody, a couple said we didn't write ...

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