

ELECTION TALK

We'd like to open our study this morning on considering just why we have the type of yearly elections we do.

What is the fundamental background for it.

In Acts 14:23, where it speaks of Paul and Barnabas, we read:

Acts 14:23 "And when they had ordained them elders in every Church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord."

The thought of this Greek word "ordained" according to Professor Strong is:

Strong 5500:

"to be a hand reacher or voter - by raising the hand."

Youngs Concordance:

"To elect by stretching out the hand."

So the actual thought here is not one of Paul and Barnabas selecting specific individuals and saying they are going to be your Elders - no - but rather Paul and Barnabas were evangelists as it were, getting the brethren together, teaching, exhorting, telling them of the Plan, -- then helping the brethren to form ecclesias. They explained to them the method that the Lord desired for them to use in selecting Elders and Deacons.

Which was that the individual brethren in that locality - by the stretching forth of the hand were to appoint the ones who they desired to be their Elders - as well as their Deacons.

Now a question might arise at this point as to just why did the Lord use this method? Why is it that the Lord just didn't have the Apostles themselves appoint the leaders or teachers in each area?

Or why didn't they set up more or less a central headquarters that would make the appointments, as many Churches do to this day. In most churches the local congregations do not appoint their own teachers but rather its a central governing board who decide who is going to be the ministers, pastors, or a particular locality or church.

WHY DIDN'T THE LORD USE THIS METHOD?

Because it immediately would have the tendency to divide the brethren into 2 classes - clergy and laity. One being considered on a higher level than the other.

Gal 3:28 tells us:

Gal. 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond or free, there is neither male or female, for ye are all one in Christ."

All were to be considered equal. All were to be striving and studying together.

So what better way than to have each group select from amongst themselves those they desired to be their elders and deacons.

Who would know best the brethren's qualifications - their abilities to teach - their conduct, their character -- than those who lived with them - met with them regularly in a particular place.

In addition, having a central headquarters giving authority to the various groups - takes away the autonomy, the personal initiative, the incentive of each group to endeavor to the extent that they can to develop from amongst themselves those that could be used of the Lord.

How much better to have the individual brethren select from amongst themselves - those who they have known - who they recognize have certain qualifications - certain abilities and even most important -- they have the character that they would want their overseers to have - and so it is with us!

Yes, the Ecclesia organization that the Lord saw fit to set up was by far the most desirable.

ANOTHER POINT WE WOULD LIKE TO CONSIDER - is why do we have our elections yearly. From one standpoint it seems so time consuming and repetitive. Many other groups ordain a minister for life.

Just what is to be gained by having yearly elections?

Let us consider what would happen if our elections were for life - or an indefinite period. It could happen that one would take their office for granted and not fulfill the responsibility of that office as it should be fulfilled.

What would happen then? Problems for sure!

But with our annual elections, it gives the brethren an opportunity - noting the experiences of the past year - to express their approval, or disapproval in the elections by the raising of a hand.

We'd like to read a quotation from Reprint 1890, where it refers to the reason why it is desirable to have regular, periodic elections of Elders. We believe the same principal is applicable to all offices and committees as to why we have rotation.

Reprint 1890
"Because if no such arrangements and appointments had been made in the legitimate way indicated by the Apostles, someone will take the leadership and hold it indefinitely; and almost imperceptibly a whole company will find itself more or less in bondage to that one.

A few sentences later Bro. Russell states:

Reprint 1898 "By this time some other brother in the company proves more capable for the larger and more public work, but all fear to suggest that the more capable brother take the lead, for fear of offending the one of less ability, though long recognized and still beloved. In some cases even a hint of such a thing manifests a little resentment, and it is plain that the brother has come to feel a sort of proprietorship in the company."

It is for these reasons, as well as others that we have elections annually and rotation of officers and committees. Hopefully it will never happen - but if it does we have a safeguard.

Another reason for officer and committee rotation is - I think we can recognize by the rotating of various Committees, we are developing latent or hidden talents in different brethren as they fulfill new varied responsibilities.

Also they may bring new outlooks to the forefront that prove to be very beneficial in our service to the LOrd to the truth and the brethren.

AS WE REFLECT UPON OUR ELECTIONS, we want to pay special attention to the importance and seriousness of this occasion.

You know its easy after many years having experienced elections, we can more or less take them for granted. Truly we need to guard against this and reflect very seriously on the importance of each election that will take place - and to consider very prayerfully the vote that cast or withhold.

We are all going to be participating in selecting Elders and Deacons, those who will be ministering and looking out for our spiritual welfare.

As we consider it, we are choosing those who will be influential in the most important aspect of our lives - the making of our calling and election sure!

Oh, we don't want to think of it from the standpoint that they are the ones that are going to determine whether we will - or will not - make our calling and election sure - NO!

Only we ourselves can determine that. It is our lives, our character, our zeal, our love that is being tested.

But those whom we select to be our helpers in this respect certainly do have an affect upon us and so we need to prayerfully consider each and every vote.

Not to think of it from the standpoint of - "oh, who do I like" - "who is a nice person" -- not to think of it from a sympathetic standpoint of I feel sorry for this one - or I think it would be good for this one.

No, as much as possible, we have to divorce our own personal feelings towards an individual and as much as possible consider what would the Lord have me to do.

Probably all of us have what we may refer to as our favorite

Who would be most qualified to be a help to me - as well as to the other brethren in making our calling and election sure.

As in so many things in our Christian walk, we have to be careful that the pendulum of our decision making does not swing to extremes.

We do have to be careful that we don't treat elections lightly, but very prayerfully, seeking to know the Lord's will in each vote.

On the other hand, we have to be careful that we don't expect near perfection from one before we vote for them.

We want to keep our standards high, but it is possible for them to be so high, we find it difficult to vote for hardly any.

One of the reasons may have been that a fair number of the brethren on the list were new, who the brethren may not have heard. In a case like this, we feel that rather than not voting for them, it would be better to inquire of other brethren who did know them, to consider together their qualifications.

We may have a similar case next week when we vote for our own class Elders, Deacons and Committees.

Some brethren because of circumstances may be able to attend only the first meeting on Sunday, And as a result may not be too familiar with the capabilities of the new nominees for Elders and Deacons since they have spoken on symposiums and have led studies at a time when you were not present.

If this is true in anyones case, we would highly suggest making inquiry of other brethren you have confidence in, seeking their evaluation --

Or even better yet, to have a prolonged period of fellowship with the brethren you may not be too familiar with, to ascertain for yourself their qualifications.

We do not think it's proper NOT to vote for someone, merely because we do not know them. But rather we believe its our responsibility to get the information from the individual themselves, or from others we have confidence in, sufficient to help us to make an intelligent decision, in seeking to know the LORD'S WILL on each vote we cast - or FAIL TO CAST.

May we always remember the seriousness of participating in an election. For each time we vote for - or withhold our vote, we are in reality affecting the destiny, in part, of both ourselves, the one we are voting for, as well as our entire ecclesia.

May our vote never be withheld, because of a lack of knowledge on our part regarding the individual.

This brings up the question, especially for those who are relatively new in our Class - WHO MAY VOTE? WHO ARE ENTITLED TO VOTE?

And we answer this -- only those who have made a full, complete, unreserved consecration to the Lord -- and have accepted him as their Redeemer - their guide - their teacher -- and desire to live their lives in accordance with His will.

Some may have made a consecration but have not yet had the opportunity to symbolize it - if so they may feel free to vote - if they are in addition, a regular attender of our meetings.

MOTION: Move that:

1. We have one vote for Elders; that
2. We recognize the liberty of the elders to submit to the Appointment Committee the meetings they feel capable of leading and can conscientiously lead and that
3. We recognize the liberty of the individual Study Meetings to select their own study materials from the writings of Pastor Russell or a Bible Study.

Amendment: Move that we add the words, "With Brother Russell's references to point #3. Carried 50-20.

Amended Motion carried: 44-35 (September 16, 1984.

The fact we will not vote only once for Elder, does not mean that all need to have the same talents and capabilities.

As we will see shortly, Bro. Russell shows us there are different aspects of Eldership, each requiring different abilities.

The difference in our new method of voting, doesn't do away with the various categories, but rather it just leaves it up to the individual Elder to decide what types of meetings he feels capable of leading and can conscientiously lead.

We now would like to go over a few of the different aspects of Eldership Bro. Russell brings to our attention in the 6th Volume.

As we consider them, we would like to bear in mind that if a nominee for Elder fits the qualifications for any of the categories, we should vote for them - and they in turn will now have the responsibility, if elected, of looking for the Lord's guidance in deciding which meetings they are capable of leading.

Vol. 6 - page 245

As elders of the Church are all overseers, caretakers, watchers of the interest of Zion, some locally and some in the broad and general sense, so also each, according to his talent and ability, might serve the flock, one as an evangelist, whose qualifications fitted him and whose conditions permitted him to go about preaching the truth to beginners--finding those possessed of an ear to hear the good tidings, etc.; another serving the flock as a pastor (shepherd), because of special qualifications of a social kind, enabling him to look after the interest of the Lord's people personally, individually--visiting them at their homes, encouraging them, strengthening them, holding together and defending them against the wolves in sheep's clothing who would bite and devour them.

"Prophets" also had their special qualifications for service.

The word "prophet" is not generally used today in the broad sense in which it was used in olden times, but is rather understood to signify a seer, or foreteller. The word prophet, however strictly signifies a public speaker--an orator."

Vol. 6, page 249

In addition to the foregoing limitations, it is required that an Elder shall be "apt to teach"; that is to say, he must have ability as a teacher, explainer, expounder of the divine plan, and thus to be able to assist the Lord's flock in word and in doctrine. It is not essential to eldership that the talent or qualifications of a "prophet" or public speaker be possessed; there may be found several in the same Church possessing teaching abilities and pastoral and other qualifications of an Elder, and yet possibly none possessing the qualifications of a public speaker or declaimer of the divine plan.

Others of the elders, perhaps not so apt to teach, may be just in their element in prayer and testimony meetings, which should be a feature amongst the various gatherings of the Lord's people."

So we can see from Bro. Russell's writings the various types of Eldership responsibilities pointed out.

We can also see this in Eph. 4:11,12:

Ephesians 4:11,12

"And he gave some apostles, and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

Bro. Russell seems to summarize on page 251 his thoughts on the various aspects of Eldership.

Vol. 6, Page 251:

It will be seen, then, that the elders in the Church should primarily possess general qualifications fitting them for eldership, and secondarily that their special natural qualifications should determine in what part of the service they can best serve the Lord's cause.

So in our elections, we will have "one" vote on the general qualifications for Eldership. Then each individual Elder will strive to see the Lord's will for himself in the best use of their natural qualifications.

The next category we would like to consider is that of Deacon.

We find that the word Deacon really has the thought of being a servant, a minister of others.

From one standpoint we realize, therefore, that all Elders are in reality Deacons too - and from a broader standpoint all brethren are Deacons -- from the standpoint of helping to serve - to minister to others.

We recall the words of our Lord in Matt. 23:11 that would help to bring out this thought. There our Lord said:

Matthew 23:11

"He that is greatest among you, shall be your servant."

And the word for servant here is "Deakonis" - the same word for Deacon.

The Scriptures indicate that the Deacons were to be assistants to the Elders - helping in the overall work of the Ecclesia that needed to be done.

Often it was in temporal matters, but it wasn't limited to that.

We recall Phillip's ministry of preaching in Samaria - his account with the Ethiopian Eunuch and Stephen witness at death.

Above all, may we remember the thought of Deacon is a minister - or servant.

A question that might present itself, is how many Elders and Deacons should we have? I like very much what Bro. Russell presented in the 6th Volume page 281.

Volume 6, page 281:

We favor having as many as are possessed of the outlined qualifications, and the dividing of the services amongst them. If the proper zeal actuates them, some kind of missionary or evangelistic work will soon claim some of them, or portions of the time of many. Each Ecclesia should thus be a theological seminary from which efficient teachers would continually be going forth to wider fields of service.

I like this thought of how each Ecclesia - especially the larger Ecclesias - such as ours - should be as a theological seminary - where brethren are continually being trained - and that they could be used in broader fields of service to help others.

We would like to read a short portion along this line -- how the Ecclesia should endeavor to develop brethren and then to use the capabilities of these brethren in whatever and every way they can in helping the members of the body of Christ to the greatest extent they can.

Reprint 3014:

"An effort should be made to develop whatever talent there is in any little company--to incite and draw out thought and expression respecting the divine plan as presented in the Word. Let those who have ability to preach do so in moderation; let them also help others to various shares in the service of the truth. As each seeks to grow in grace and to assist other, the Lord will open further and wider doors of opportunity--perhaps in nearby towns or in other quarters of the same city. The harvest is great and the laborers are few, and it should be the constant effort of all who are faithful to the Lord and to the cause, not only to serve one another, but to help one another into the service."

(Paraphrase about our new brethren nominees.)

Let us consider now the Apostle Paul's list of qualification for the office of Elders and Deacons -- qualifications that were given to Paul thru the Holy Spirit - as to what the ideal Elder and Deacon should be.

And as we go thru these, we just want to bear in mind that these are the ideal. I think that if we were to exact perfection in each of these categories, it would be nigh to impossible finding the perfect brother to fulfill them.

But to the extent that we can, we should elect brethren who fulfill each qualification to as great an extent as possible.

We will basically follow the qualifications as given in 1 Tim. 3:1-7:

1 Timothy 3:1-7:

"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."

We notice here how it is good for one to desire to help and serve others - if this is the motivating factor - to be used of the Lord -- to render help and assistance -- in service to others truly it is a desirable, a good quality.

Any service that we could render to the brethren - to the truth - to the body of Christ is a blessed service.

We want to consider here the word "Bishop." Actually the word here in the Greek has the meaning of "Overseer."

That is basically what the office of Elder is - it's an overseer. One who looks out for the spiritual interest of the body of Christ.

We go on to verse 2.

"A bishop then must be blameless."

Or as the Amplified puts it:

"must give no grounds for accusation but must be above reproach."

"The husband of one wife."

We believe the thought here is not necessarily that he have to be married - because we recognize that our Lord and the Apostle Paul were not -- and they admonished this state --but rather that he must not have more than one wife.

And we could see the importance of this qualification more so in the early Church -- the time of the writing of this,-- because it was a frequent practice for men to have more than one wife under the conditions then prevailing.

"He is to be vigilant, sober, of good behavior" --

Other translations put it that "he must be temperate, master of himself, unruffled, leading an orderly, or disciplined life, exercising self-control."

"He should be given to hospitality."

Another translation has it:

"He must be hospitable, showing love for and being a friend to the believers, especially strangers or foreigners."

One that truly loves to be with others - a disposition which others see that he is glad to be with them - to talk with them and to have them in his home and so on.

"An overseer must be apt to teach."

And certainly we can see this requirement for the one who is going to be a teacher - an overseer.

He must have the ability to convey the truth, to stimulate others, admonish others, correct others and help them in the ways of the Lord that together we might all grow closer into the image of our dear Master.

"Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre."

Revised Standard:

"No drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome and no lover of money."

Certainly we could see that it would be completely inappropriate for one to be an overseer of the body of Christ who would have the lack of self-control - being given to much wine or intoxication which would be injurious to himself - and a very poor example to the body of Christ.

And he must be one who is gentle -- not one that desires to get in combative argument. Certainly the thought of desiring to have a conciliatory nature - a nature striving to bring about a peaceful environment in the Ecclesia is one to be desired.

Going on to verse 4:

"An overseer should be one that ruleth 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."

Certainly we can see the need for the Elder to manage his own household well -- and that as Goodspeed translates the portion for children:

"Keeping his children under control and perfectly respectful."

It would somewhat cast a doubt on the ability of a brother to teach others -- or to teach the household of faith - the Ecclesia - the Church -- in a manner that would be appropriate, if he was unable to have his own household - his children to be respectful, to have self-control and so on.

We go on to the 6th verse:

"Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil."

Thought of novice in Greek is - newly planted or a young convert.

We believe the thought here being expressed is that it should be one who is sufficiently grounded in truth - and I think we would want to add primarily in character -- sufficiently grounded in the quality of character that they would not fall a victim to pride merely because they were voted into this position.

This is I think the primary thought that we want to consider -- not so much the doctrinal aspect. However it's obvious one should not be a novice in their knowledge -- for some might learn the doctrines very quickly -- but the maturity of heart and mind -- of humility is being referred to here as not being a novice.

As in all things it's possible to go to an extreme and feel this means you must have graying hair. Bro. Russell was an Elder in early 20's and others as well.

We go on to verse 7:

"Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

The New English Bible translates this:

"with good reputation with the non-Christian public."

Most brethren spend much time working in the world every day with non-Christians. It is here that the principles of truth must also be applied.

In other words, the individual is not to be hypocritical -- in the Church having one disposition and then going into the world being completely different.

No, these principles of truth and honesty must continue in every phase - in every aspect of life that they will be able to be recognized -- by not only the Church but by all with whom the individual comes in contact.

This covers the basic thoughts for Elder in Timothy.

The qualifications in Titus are very similar. One of the points that Paul elaborates on in Titus is in Titus 1:9 using the Diaglott:

Titus 1:9 (Diaglott):

"Maintaining the true word in his teaching so that he may be able both to exhort by the sound instruction and to confute the opposers."

This is very similar to the thought of being "apt to teach." Being able to exhort others, to stimulate others thru instruction. And to be able to logically, Scripturally, reasonably, give an answer to - as it brings out here - "confute the opposers" -- those who might bring error into the Church.

One of the qualifications then should be that they should be able and willing to oppose error in whatever and any form the Church is confronted with and to bring forth the true, the pure teachings of the Holy Word.

Next Paul goes on to the office of Deacon - or as the Diaglott states it "assistants." And we'll note that as we go thru these that the qualifications are very similar. That it is the heart condition that is most important. We'll note the one exception of the two qualifications is the being "apt to teach."

Continuing on in 1 Timothy 3, verse 8.

1 Tim. 3:8:

"Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre."

The Diaglott has it that:

"They ought to be serious, not deceitful in speech, not be addicted to much wine, not eager for base gain."

So here we see that the Deacon - the servants are likewise to have an upright quality. They are to speak the truth in purity and not to be greedy of filthy lucre.

The thought being here that their motivation of life should be continually striving for the things of the Lord -- the things of the Spirit. Not being motivated to look for material gains, material ambitions but the highest aims - the highest ambition should be foremost in mind thruout all their doings - that of serving the Lord.

Verse 9.

"Holding the mystery of the faith in pure conscience."

Another translation:

"These must be men who combine a clear conscience with a firm hold on the deep truths of our faith."

Verse 10:

"And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of deacon, being found blameless."

Here we have the similar admonition as to the Elders. They must not be one that could be easily puffed up because of their character not having been developed to the point that they could take this office in humility and meekness.

Verse 11:

"Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things."

There is some difference of opinion on this Scripture. Many translations giving the thought that rather than "wives" it should be "women" -- and that it is referring in reality to Deaconesses.

The Diaglott has verse 11:

"Let the women in like manner be serious, not accusers, vigilant, faithful in all things."

On Reprint 1891, Bro. Russell gives the thought that many suppose that this Scripture 1 Tim. 3:11 does refer to female assistants as also does Romans 16:1.

Romans 16:1

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the Church which is at Senchrea."

And it would seem that it would perhaps refer more to Deaconesses because there is no similar admonition regarding the Elder's wives - and so it would seem to point in that direction.

Verse 12 goes on:

"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."

And here in verse 13, the similar admonition as for the Elders.

"For they that have used the office of a Deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus."

The Diaglott has it:

"For those having served well acquire to themselves an honorable station."

We'd just like to mention here as we're reflecting on the qualifications of Deacons, how we believe that the Ecclesia the size that we have - has a need for a great number of brethren who can serve in this capacity of Deacon to fulfill the many and varied responsibilities of the Ecclesia.

We believe that we can and should be developing our brethren right along - noting continually those who are maturing in the truth, those who manifest a desire and zeal to serve the Lord, and who can serve to fulfill our present duties and to expand our service in ways yet unthought of.

We'd like to consider now the election of our Class officers and the various Committees and how very important it is that we give much thought and consideration these offices and Committees as well as to Elders and Deacons.

How well it would be if each of us would during the week, consider jotting down those who we feel would have the time, the knowledge, the ability, the desire, the willingness to serve in each specific office and committee.

Then when we come to our meeting, we will be prepared more fully to nominate because of giving considerable previous thought to each position - those who would be most qualified to fulfill the responsibility of that office or committee.

In addition to considering qualifications, another point we'd like to mention in regards to our Committees is that we need to consider the spreading out of the work as it were. So that no one gets too many responsibilities and then are unable to fulfill them as they ought.

So as the election progresses, we need to bear this in mind in addition to the qualifications.

Another point we would like to consider regarding the Committees is the importance of each of us to analyze our own lives, our own hearts and minds as we are nominated for a particular office.

We couldn't help but notice over the years quite frequently a great number of brethren, the moment they are nominated to an office withdraw.

And this is not to say that there are occasions when brethren realizing the various responsibilities and obligations that they have that others may be unaware of, have a very logical reason for their withdrawing.

But we can't help but wonder how often - how often - we just do not want too much work. We merely begin to rationalize and find ways and means and reasons as to why it would be best for us not to be on this Committee.

It's the easiest thing in the world to let somebody else do it - and it so easy, if we're not careful - to find - to invent - a good reason to make ourselves feel good as to why we withdraw.

Our minds might immediately say - we're not qualified. We don't have the time - others are better - we don't have the desire - we don't have the means - or what have you.

Oh, may we endeavor to consider that perhaps this is one of the means the Lord is using to indicate to us what his will might be for us.

If there is any doubt, may we let the results be indicated by the hands of the brethren - indicating the will of the Lord.

So may we when our name is nominated - may we consider very carefully, am I rationalizing, or am I not? Remembering each offer of service is one more opportunity of laying treasure in heaven.

Now we'd just like to consider briefly the responsibilities of those who will be elected to the various offices - Elders, Deacon and of the various Committees.

We'd like to quote a portion from Reprint 2221:

"They should remember that, having accepted special appointment as ministers, they had an added responsibility on behalf of the Lord's flock.

Oh, that all the servants of the Lord's cause might take this exhortation to heart, and feel the responsibility that rests upon all who minister in holy things. (And this will apply in a still wider sense, for every brother and every sister is to some extent his brother's and sister's keeper, and is commissioned to help in watching over the Lord's flock.)"

Yes, each of us as members of the body of Christ is to a great extent his brothers and sisters keeper.

May each one who is elected to a specific office bear this thought in mind continually and serve faithfully as possible -- viewing this appointment as though the Lord himself touched us -- and said he would like us to fulfill a certain responsibility.

May we look upon the vote of the Ecclesia as an appointment that we will endeavor to perform with all the vigor, the vitality, the strength, the zeal we have to fulfill the office faithfully.

If the Lord has appointed us to a service, may we render it with full determination, with zeal and with effort to do with our might what our hands would find to do in fulfilling the responsibility that was put upon us.

Then too the Class has a responsibility regarding the teachings of Class servants in our Class and those who serve us at conventions.

We would like to note that repeatedly we are admonished in the Scriptures that no one should take the teaching of another as being Gospel truth--without having first proved it for themselves - and this we realize we must always do. We need to weigh, we need to consider every thought that is presented to see if it has a "thus saith the Lord" behind it!

And so as we enter into this final week before our elections, may we all earnestly pray to be led of the Lord - to know what his will would be for us in the election - and also to pray the Lord's guidance and overruling in the nomination and elections regarding ourselves and that if we should be appointed to a service, may we resolve that we will endeavor to fulfill it with all the zeal and determination we are capable of!