

I. QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE OFFICE

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

(1) Experience.

We mean by this, experience in the life of a Christian. Paul says that an Elder should not be a new convert, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. [1 Ti. 3:6](#). The reason here given shows that the office was one of high honor and responsibility; otherwise, the occupant of it would incur no danger of being lifted up with pride. The condemnation of the devil is the condemnation into which the devil fell, which, according to Paul's understanding of it, resulted from pride. A new convert would be more likely to fall into this sin than an experienced Christian, because he would more recently have escaped the habitual service of Satan, and would have led power to resist temptation. In assigning this qualification, the apostle shows how important it is that *pride of office* shall not characterize the Eldership. It is the same important lesson that Jesus taught the disciples when he said, "He that would be greatest among you, let him be servant of all."

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

(2) Reputation.

The good which a church is capable of accomplishing in a community depends very much upon its reputation, and the reputation of the church depends much upon that of its representative men. Most wisely, therefore, it is required that an Elder shall have a "good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." [1. Ti. 3:7](#). If he fall into reproach, not only is the church reproached with him, but he must soon lose his influence over the membership of the church, and it is difficult for the devil to construct a snare more likely to catch his victim than when he brings an Elder into reproach within the church. Both the Elder himself and many members of his flock are exposed to almost certain ruin in that event. Many brethren can be found who have been caught in this snare, and who are now either standing aloof from the church, or coldly and sourly looking on and criticizing those who do the work which they once failed to do.

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

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

(3) *Domestic relations.*

To Timothy and Titus both, the apostle prescribes that the overseer shall be the husband of one wife. There has been a vast amount of disputation as to whether this requires him to be a married man. It is alleged, in opposition to this idea, that when churches were planted among a people practicing polygamy, men would frequently be immersed who had a plurality of wives, and that the apostle intends only to prohibit such from being made overseers. Undoubtedly the use of the numeral one in the text has this force, and it would be unlawful to place a polygamist or bigamist in the office. But while the expression has this force, we think that candor requires the admission that it also has the effect of requiring a man to be a married man. That he should be the husband of one wife, forbids having less than one as clearly as it forbids having more than one. If it be said that a man owns but one farm, it is just as clearly implied that he owns one as that he owns no more than one. Moreover, the context confirms the conclusion; for the apostle proceeds in both epistles to state how the overseer must govern his household, and especially his children; which statements imply that he is to be a man of family.

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

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

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

(4) Character.

The traits of character prescribed for an Elder are numerous, and when considered as a whole they present a very rare combination. The first of these in logical order, and the first mentioned in both of the epistles which treat of the subject, is *blamelessness*. When it is said that an overseer must be *blameless*, we must of necessity understand the term in a comparative, not in an absolute sense. This necessity arises from the fact acknowledged and insisted upon by the apostles, that no man is entirely blameless when his character stands a fair comparison with the characters of other good men. The apostle seems, to have his eye upon the counterpart of the good reputation which we have already mentioned. If a man possessing a good repute among them who are without, is known to have a character corresponding to this, he is blameless in the only sense in which men in the flesh can be blameless. We may remark further, that this qualification, from the very fact of its being comparative, must admit of different degrees, and that some qualified Elders may be more blameless than others. The degree which is requisite to eligibility in any given case, must be determined by those who are immediately concerned in the selection and ordination of the Elder.

To be blameless, is merely to be free from faults. Not content with this general prohibition, the apostle proceeds to specify some faults which it is especially important for the overseer to avoid. He must not be *covetous*. We have already spoken of the importance of this prohibition, while treating of the example which the Elders should set before their brethren. A covetous Eldership will make a covetous church, and a covetous church is a dead church.

As the Elder must not be covetous, so, according to the reading of our common version, he must not be "greedy of filthy lucre." The Greek adjective, of which this expression is the rendering, is *aischrokerdos*, compounded of *aischros*, *base*, and *kerdos*, *gain*. There is a slight difference of opinion as to its meaning. Some critics render it "*greedy of gain*," and some, "*making money by base means*." The latter understand the apostle as prohibiting any disreputable business; and the

former, as prohibiting the greed for gain which would lead to such a business. By either rendering, a disreputable occupation is prohibited--such, for example, as dealing in intoxicating liquors, jockey trading, rearing sporting stock, renting property for improper uses, and such like, in none of which can a man engage unless his greed for gain overrides his regard for the welfare of the community. Any other course of life by which a man betrays an excessive greed for gain is undoubtedly prohibited.

The apostle also specifies among prohibited faults, *self-will*. The Elder must not be *self-willed*. No man is fit to hold office jointly with other men, who is not content to often yield his own will to that of his compeers. Neither is any man capable of exercising moral sway over a community, who, possesses an iron will that never bends to the wishes of others. We speak now of matters which are lawfully subject to the will of man, not of those in which God's will has been declared. Within the limits of the latter there is no room for the human will to play--it has only to submit.

In the third place, the overseer is to avoid every thing which would disturb the peace of the church. He is not to be a "*striker*," nor a "*brawler*," nor even "*soon angry*," but in opposition to all these, he is to be "*temperate*" and "*patient*." He will have frequent occasions for the trial of his patience, if he makes vigorous efforts to discharge his duties; and unless he be well supplied with it, though he may not fall to brawling and striking, he will become ill-tempered and discouraged. Nothing is more wisely said, than that he must be patient.

Besides the negative qualifications, or traits of character which an overseer must not possess, the apostle names a number of *positive* elements of character. He must be "*just*," for he is a judicial functionary of the church; he must be "*sober*," that is sober minded, for *levity*, which sobriety forbids, argues a want of piety; he must be a "*lover of hospitality*," for otherwise he is devoid of that sympathy which is necessary in order to secure the affection of others; he must be "*a lover of good men*," for all good men love one another; he must be "*holy*," for he is set apart to a holy office, and his official acts concern the most holy relations which bind mere to one another and to their God.

(5) *Habits*

A man's habits grow out of his character, but they also react upon his character, tending constantly to make it either better or worse. A habit of vigilance, or watchfulness, is enjoined upon the Elder, because without it many things most deleterious to the congregation would escape his notice. A want of this habit is a very common fault. While the overseer should be far better informed as to the condition of the members of the church than any other person in it or outside of it, it is often the case that through mere want of watchfulness he is the last to learn what is going on. A habit of watchfulness in matters of business is apt to follow a man into the office of overseer; hence the importance of requiring it as a condition of eligibility.

It is not more important for the overseer to be watchful, than that he should avoid the only other habits mentioned by the apostle, and not implied in the qualifications already discussed. He must not be "given to much wine." It is not merely drunkenness that is here prohibited; if it was, we would doubtless have the word which is appropriated to the expression of that idea. Neither is the idea of *much* in the original. The term is *paroinon, by wine*, and means simply, *given to wine*.

It doubtless contemplates a man who is given to a freer use of wine than was customary among strictly sober people even though he might never become intoxicated.

We have now glanced rapidly at the rare combination of moral traits and habits which must characterize the overseer, and will next discuss the intellectual qualifications which are necessary to his usefulness as a teacher.

II. INTELLECTUAL QUALIFICATIONS

While the moral and religious traits of character requisite for the office of Elder are numerous, and some of them are demanded by the apostle with great emphasis, only one qualification of an intellectual character is mentioned, and this is expressed in general terms. This fact is significant, and admonishes us not to mis-adjust the divine balance, by making the most of what which is made the least of in the Scriptures.

(1) APT TO TEACH

This one intellectual qualification is represented in the [Epistle to Timothy](#) by the expression, "*apt to teach*." The Greek for this expression is *didaktikos*, which I prefer to render "*capable of teaching*." The Elder, then, must be capable of teaching; but this expression represents a variable quantity. One might be capable of teaching some persons, and utterly incapable of teaching others. It becomes a matter of necessity, then, that before we can form a judgment as to a man's possession of this qualification in the requisite degree, we must know who it is that he is to teach. A person capable of teaching children might be incapable of teaching adults, as one capable of teaching an academy might be incapable of teaching the classes in a college. So an Elder might be capable of teaching a congregation in one community, and not in another near by. What is the standard, then, by which each individual candidate for the Eldership is to be judged in this respect? Undoubtedly, it is to be found in the attainments of the congregation which he is to teach. He is to be *their* teacher, and theirs alone; consequently, if he is capable of teaching them, he has the capability required by the Scriptures. From this it appears that properly qualified Elders may possess capability of teaching in as great variety of degrees as characterizes the intellectual and religious attainments of the various congregations. Furthermore, it must be evident that each individual congregation is the best judge of the capability of an Elder to be its teacher. So long as they receive instruction from the Elder, and are satisfied with him, he is qualified according to the Scriptures to teach that congregation, however much he may fall below some other Elder in some other congregation.

(2) HOLD FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD

But this capability of teaching has a special direction given to it in the [epistle to Titus](#). It is there said that the Elder must "hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and to convict the gainsayers." Here, both the source of his information, and one of the specific objects of his teaching are mentioned. The specific object is to exhort and convict the gainsayer--exhort them till exhortation fails, and then convict them before the congregation as corrupt opposers of the truth. Of course, this is only one of the many objects of teaching, and is mentioned in this place because the young congregations in Crete

were at that time infested by "vain talkers and deceivers." The source of information by which the Elders were to silence these men, was not the philosophy in which the latter boasted, but the faithful word which had already been taught. The Elders are required to hold fast this "faithful word," and, as a consequence, condemn everything unauthorized by it. A "thus saith the Lord" was to be the touch stone of every doctrine and every practice which Jew or Gentile might introduce, and thus, by "*sound teaching*," the Elders were to stop the mouths of all in their respective congregations who taught things which they ought not.

It is an old question, as old, at least, as Presbyterianism, whether capability to teach must characterize every eligible candidate for the Eldership. The Presbyterian theory requires one teaching Elder and a plurality of ruling Elders in each congregation, and they claim that they find authority for this distinction in the well-known words of Paul: "The Elders who rule well count worthy of double honor, specially they who labor in word and teaching." After all that has been said and written on this passage, we think that candor most certainly requires the admission that there were some Elders who did not labor in word and teaching. Every attempt which we have ever seen to set aside this obvious inference from the words, is a mere subterfuge like those so often adopted to obscure the plain statements of the Scriptures in reference to baptism. Let us deal fairly with our own minds, and the Scriptures will more readily yield to us their meaning.

But while we are thus compelled, by the obvious meaning of plain words, to admit that there were Elders in the primitive churches who did not labor in word and teaching--that is, who did not preach and teach publicly, we are by no means compelled to admit that it was because they were *incapable* of teaching. Capability of teaching being a prescribed qualification for the Eldership, we may not suppose that it was disregarded in the selection of Elders, unless it be in uninstructed congregations. But Paul does not mention the "Elders that rule well" in a manner to indicate that their appointment was irregular. There is another way to account for the distinction made without supposing a violation of the law; and that is, that although all of the Elders were capable of teaching, some were more capable than others, and the burden of this part of the work was for this reason assigned to them by mutual consent. Where a number of men are associated together in an office of multifarious duties, it is almost invariably the case that some are better adapted for one duty, and others for another; and in order to the greatest efficiency of the body they must of necessity adopt a corresponding division of labor. It is natural, therefore, if not unavoidable, that in the practical working of a board of Elders, some of them should do little else than rule, and others little else than teach and preach. Jointly, they are responsible for the teaching and ruling; among themselves they must divide the labor in such way as will accomplish the best results. The best rule that they can jointly exercise, and the best instruction that they can jointly impart, is what the Lord requires at their hands.

Some of the Christian congregations of the present day are at work on the plan here indicated. They have a board of Elders, all of whom are capable of teaching, and one of whom is a preacher. The latter proclaims the gospel to the world in the public assembly, and takes the leading part in the instruction of the congregation. He gives his whole time to the work, and lives of the gospel which he preaches. The others take a secondary part in the teaching, and share in full the responsibility of ruling. They give but a portion of their time to the work, and give it, like the Elders of the church at Ephesus, gratuitously. [Acts xx: 34, 35](#). This is Scriptural and wise.

In a still larger number of congregations, an Evangelist is called to the aid of the Eldership. He preaches and takes the leading part in teaching, while the Elders take the secondary part in teaching, and supreme control in ruling, making use, however, of whatever wisdom and experience the evangelist may possess, to aid them. This we also pronounce Scriptural; for in this capacity Timothy labored among the Elders at Ephesus, and Epaphroditus among those at Philippi. [Acts xx: 17, comp. 1 Ti. i: 3; Phil. i: 1, comp. ii: 25-30.](#)

But, besides these, we must acknowledge that there are many congregations among us with Elders in office who do not teach, and who are incapable of teaching. All such should immediately do one of two things--either resign the office, or put into exercise their latent powers, and prove themselves capable of teaching and therefore qualified for the office. However, all the congregations should be taught, by the Evangelists who form them to select for the office only men who are capable of teaching, and all Evangelists should be careful to ordain only such to the office. In this way present evils may gradually be corrected, and a repetition of them in the future, avoided.

III. PLURALITY OF ELDERS.

There is no proposition in reference to the organization of the primitive churches upon which scholars and critics are more perfectly agreed than that every fully organized church had a plurality of Elders. So nearly universal is this agreement that a man betrays an ill-balanced judgment or a want of common information, if he denies the proposition. Such an agreement could not well exist without a foundation in statements of Scripture so unambiguous as to leave no room for doubt. We will notice a few of these.

In the first place, after Paul and Barnabas had passed through Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, and established a church in each, they returned through the same cities, and Luke says: "When they ordained them Elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." [Acts xiv: 23.](#) From this it appears that they ordained Elders in every church which they planted on this tour. We find also that the church at Ephesus had a plurality of Elders, also called overseers; [Acts xx: 17-28](#); that the same was true of the church at Philippi, [Phil. i: 1](#); and that Titus was left at Crete to ordain Elders in *every city*, which is equivalent to ordaining them in every church, because there was but one church in each city.

We are now aware that efforts have been made at times, by eccentric writers to throw doubt upon these statements. It has been assumed that there were a plurality of congregations in Ephesus, Philippi and the cities of Crete, and that the single Elders of these separate congregations made up the plurality. But this assumption is totally without foundation in the Scriptures, and is in direct conflict with the earliest uninspired history which represents but one organized body of believers as existing in one city. It is true that in these cities the disciples often had several meeting places, but there is no evidence of separate and independent organizations. The assumption in question also conflicts with the positive declaration that Paul and Barnabas ordained *Elders in every church*. What they did in one district they did in all; for they had but one gospel to preach, and but one system of government and order to establish throughout the earthly kingdom of God.

There is abundant evidence that this plurality of Elders in each congregation continued after the close of the Apostolic history, and that it existed in some churches of whose organization nothing is specially said in the Scriptures. For example, there is nothing said in the New Testament of the Eldership in Corinth, yet the epistle of the church in Rome to the church in Corinth commonly called the epistle of Clement, written about the close of the first century, proves that there was a plurality of Elders in Corinth. The writer says to the Corinthians "It is a shame, and unworthy of your Christian profession to hear that the most firm and ancient church of the Corinthians should, by one or two persons, be led into a sedition against its Elders." The epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, written in the early part of the second century, shows that the Eldership continued in Philippi as Paul left it, and that there was a similar Eldership in Smyrna, whence the epistle was written; for Polycarp writes in the name of himself and "the Elders that are with him," and gives advice to the Elders in Philippi as to the discharge of their official duties. He says, "Let the Elders be compassionate and merciful toward all, turning them from their errors, seeking out those that are weak, not forgetting the widows, the fatherless and the poor, but always providing what is good both in the sight of God and man." But it is needless to multiply evidences of a fact which is already established to the satisfaction of candid minds. We proceed, therefore, to the consideration of another eccentric view of the same subject. It is sometimes argued that the plurality of Elders found in the primitive churches is to be accounted for by the fact that the gifts of the Spirit caused those churches to abound in men possessed of the proper qualifications; but that we should not expect modern churches, which are devoid of these gifts, to always possess a plurality of members thus qualified. It is therefore concluded that modern churches need not have a plurality of Elders.

Now, we freely admit that churches are found at the present day without a plurality of members qualified for the Eldership; and some, perhaps, without even a single member thus qualified. **And we admit that such churches need not have a plurality of Elders or any Elders at all. Indeed, they must have none until they can have more than one who is qualified.** But this admission, which the nature of the case requires, by no means excuses any of the churches from establishing an order of church government entirely different from that established by the apostles; especially does it not excuse such churches as have the qualified members for neglecting to call them to the office.

The argument in question is also based upon premises unduly assumed. It is not true that gifts of the Holy Spirit qualified men for the Elder's office, except in the one matter of imparting to them the information necessary for teaching and government. They gave no men the moral, social and domestic qualifications which the apostle prescribes. Indeed, if miraculous gifts had supplied the requisite qualifications, there would have been no need of prescribing them so carefully; it would only have been necessary to say to Timothy and Titus, Ordain men who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is true that Paul and Barnabas found a plurality of qualified men in the churches of Asia Minor, in a comparatively short time after these churches had been planted, probably in from two to three years, four years being spent on their first missionary tour. But it must be remembered that in all the Jewish synagogues, which formed the starting point of Christian Churches, there were men already holding an office almost identical with that of the Christian Eldership, and that when these men came into the church, as did Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth,

they brought their qualifications and experience with them. Moreover, other aged, pious and experienced Jews who were not in office, were found competent to fill the office of Elders as soon as they received the gospel; and Gentiles, who, like Cornelius and the Centurion of Capernaum, had become devout worshipers of God through Jewish influence, were often possessed of all the qualifications for the office as soon as they were fairly established as members of the church. These facts are sufficient to account for the ordination of Elders in churches so newly planted, without supposing the imaginary fact that qualifications for the office were imparted by miraculous endowment. The intellectual qualifications, which alone were thus imparted, were then, and are now, the qualifications most easily found. I can go through the churches to-day and point you out two men, at a moderate estimate, with mind enough and speaking talent enough for the Eldership, where one can be found with the other prescribed qualifications.

We conclude, then, that in as much as the primitive churches, so many as had Elders at all, had a plurality of them, so it should be now; and that any church which departs from this rule, departs from the only model of church organization which God has given. Until a plurality of Elders could be ordained, the primitive churches did the best they could without Elders. So let it be now, and God will bless us in following the guidance of his word.

IV. SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT

It has long been a question whether church officers should be selected by the congregation at large, or by the Evangelist charged with effecting the organization of the church. There is but little said on the subject in the Scriptures, but those who are willing to be guided by the slightest indications of the will of God in preference to their own judgment, will find sufficient to satisfy them.

We have only one example on record, in which we are distinctly told what part was taken by the congregation, and what by the ordaining officers. This is the case of the seven deacons of the church in Jerusalem. The Apostles called together "the multitude of the disciples," and said, "*Look you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business,*" [Acts vi: 2, 3](#). The *selection*, then, was made by the multitude, and the appointment by the apostles. The distinction made between these two terms should not be overlooked. The term appoint is sometimes understood as including the selection, but in the style of the apostles it means merely induction into office, and is distinguished from the selection which precedes it.

Now, in the case of the Elders in the churches of Lycaonia and Pisidia, it is said that Paul and Barnabas "ordained them"; or, to express it more accurately, "*appointed* them." [Acts xiv: 23](#). The word here rendered appoint (*cheirotoneo*) is not the one so rendered in [Acts vi: 3](#); but in such a connection its current meaning is about the same. The part performed by the apostles in this case being the same as in the case of the deacons, it is fair to presume that the part performed by the people was also the same, and that Luke fails to mention it because, having previously stated the process of selecting one class of church officers, he could presume that his readers would understand that the same process was observed in the present instance. Indeed, the nature of the case is such that we would of necessity so understand it, unless expressly informed that the

process was different. If a traveler, giving an account of the customs of some newly discovered tribe of men, should describe the selection of a certain class of officers of their government, and afterward frequently speak of the selection of other classes of officers, without intimating that the process was different, it would necessarily be inferred that the process was the same, unless, indeed, there should be found something in the context, or in the nature of the case to forbid the inference.

When Titus is told to ordain or appoint Elders in every city, the same term is used, as when the apostles in Jerusalem proposed to appoint the deacons: the process, therefore, is the same, and it takes place after the selection of the officers by the people.

From these premises, we conclude that all church officers were selected by the congregation at large; and this conclusion is confirmed by the earliest uninspired history. Clement of Rome declares it a rule handed down from the apostles, that church officers "should be filled according to the judgment of approved men, with the consent of the whole community." This would indicate that the judgement of the most approved men in the congregation was given, perhaps in the way of nominations, and that the whole congregation was called upon to express their approval or disapproval. But whether nominations were made in the apostolic age can not be very certainly determined. The only certain fact is that the people elected their officers, and, therefore, whatever mode of procedure in conducting the elections seems most prudent to each individual church, is authorized by the Scriptures.

Next to the selection comes the appointment, or what is commonly called, the ordination of officers. The statements of the Scriptures on this subject are plain, and sufficiently minute. In the case of the deacons, having been chosen, we are told that they were set before the apostles, and, "when they had prayed, that laid their hands on them." They *proposed* to appoint them; what they did was to pray and lay hands on them; praying and laying on hands, then, was the mode of appointing, or, if you please, of ordaining. Fasting also is mentioned in connection with the ordination of the Elders in Lycaonia and Pisidia ([Acts xiv: 23](#)), and it is highly probable that it accompanied, or rather, preceded the service on all such occasions. With these apostolic precedents before them, Titus in Crete, and Timothy in the province of Asia, needed no express instructions as to the process of ordination; neither does the Evangelist of the present day need any more than these precedents furnish. Fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands, conducted with due solemnity, and accompanied by appropriate admonitions and exhortations, constitute the Scriptural mode of induction into office.

Through a misconception of the design and effects of ordination, the superstitious idea has extensively prevailed, that if a man is once ordained to office in a congregation, he need not be re-ordained, if he changes his locality and is elected to the same office in another congregation, that there is something perpetual about the imposition of hands, which renders a repetition of it improper. This idea is precluded when we once understand that, like the oath of office in civil government, it is a mere induction into office and is therefore to be repeated as often as an election to office takes place.

There has been much useless discussion of the question, to what church officer pertains the privilege of laying on hands. The discussion is useless, because the Scriptures furnish

unquestionable examples of hands being imposed by apostles, by prophets and by teachers, ([Acts xiii: 1-3](#)), by Elders; ([1 Ti. iv: 14](#)); and by Evangelists, ([1 Ti. v: 22](#); [Ti. i: 5](#)). At the present day, either Elders or Evangelists, or both together, may perform the service, according to the dictates of good sense and the requirement of good order on each occasion.

One more question occurs to us as worthy of a brief notice in conclusion. Paul says of the deacons, "Let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." [1 Ti. iii: 10](#). Some understand this to mean that the candidate for the deacon's office shall be put to work in the duties of the office until it is ascertained whether he can perform them well or not, before he is ordained; and that the term *also* in the sentence refers back to the Elders previously mentioned, indicating the same in reference to them. It should be observed, however, that Paul does not say that the proving he speaks of is to precede *ordination*, but to precede *using the office*. It would be reversing Paul's order, therefore, to require the candidate to use the office as a means of proving him. Instead of proving him first, and then letting him use the office, it would be requiring him to use the office first of all. Evidently this can not be the meaning: but, having prescribed the qualifications by which a candidate for each of the offices in question is to be tested, the apostle states that they must prove themselves before they are allowed to exercise the functions of the office to which they aspire.

V. REGULAR MEETINGS

In a former section of this treatise, we mentioned the necessity of regular and frequent meetings of the Eldership of the church, in order to efficiency in the discharge of their duties. It is impossible that a work, requiring the united wisdom, watchfulness and activity, of a plurality of men, can be successfully accomplished without frequent, and often protracted consultations. The members of a business firm, even if they are engaged in a comparatively small business, find such consultations necessary; and the regularity with which the directors of banks, insurance companies, and corporations of like character, hold their meetings, is very well known. How, then, can it be expected that the Elders of a church, who have the interests of many precious souls under their care, will be able to dispense with such meetings? The thought is preposterous: and consequently, we find that in all churches which are characterized by faithful discipline, such meetings are regularly held. In many of our large city churches, the Elders find it necessary to meet at least once a week, and to often spend several hours together in consultation. It is probable that there is no Eldership, even in very small congregations, who would not find occasion for weekly meetings, if they were fully alive to all the duties of the office: but when less frequent meetings are found sufficient, let them, of course, be adopted.

In these meetings some regular mode of procedure should be adopted, by which all business should be attended to in order, and nothing neglected. Reports will be heard concerning efforts to reclaim the wandering and to check the wayward. Reports, also, of new cases which have arisen, demanding the attention of the Elders. Questions in reference to all the details of the church's work will be settled, and the details of labor distributed according to the ability and adaptedness of each Elder. And lest the combined watchfulness of all the official Board should have allowed some case of delinquency to escape notice, the names on the church book will be called over in regular rotation, and the spiritual condition of each member inquired into. By this means, the

Elders will be constantly reminded of duties which might be forgotten, and constantly stimulated to the discharge of duties which might be neglected.

In the larger congregations, it is desirable to have one Elder wholly given to the work of overseeing, teaching and preaching: and we can easily imagine congregations, if we do not already have them among us, that need the labors of a plurality of such Elders. But even with the labors of one such man, to perform those parts of the duties of the office which require the larger amount of time, the difficulty in reference to time is largely obviated. In no instance, then, is this excuse a sufficient one to justify a tithing of the inefficiency which now so generally characterizes the disciplinary labors of the Eldership.

As regards preparation for public teaching, if our Elders would aim less at showy harangues upon the Lord's day, and more at plain and simple instruction on practical duties, and exhortations to the same, they would find that good preparation for the task would require no more Bible study than ought to characterize every good man, with the addition of such reflection upon Bible themes as would not more than prevent idle moments from running to waste. An economy of time, and a wisely directed use of it is what we need, rather than a greater amount of it.

Finally, the Elders of churches should constantly remember that they are divinely constituted exemplars to the flock, in all the virtues and activities of Christian life: and that one of the methods, and not the least of them, by which they should make their example felt, is to sacrifice some of their time to the service of the Lord. In so doing, they will obey the words of Paul, when he says to the Ephesian Elders, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." [Acts xx: 35.](#)

I now bring this brief treatise to a close, and send it out among my brethren in the Elders office, as a token of my heartfelt interest in an office which has cost my own heart more anxiety than all other duties which I have been called upon to perform in life. If it shall be of service to any of my fellow-laborers and companions, in tribulation, it will accomplish, to that extent, its mission.