

Eldership

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We do thank the Heavenly Father for this privilege of sharing some thoughts with you on this subject of eldership. Elder and elders are Scriptural terms for those brothers who have been appointed or elected by the stretching forth of the hand by fellow consecrated brothers and sisters of an ecclesia, a congregation, or class. Elder in an ecclesia is a term that denotes an office or a position of responsibility, an elder is to be an example, a leader. Eldership is just another expression for leadership. An office in the ecclesia means a service that needs to be rendered, hence an officer in an ecclesia is the ecclesia servant that attends to the specific duties or responsibilities of that office. In the New Testament, we specifically have the office of elders and deacons and most likely deaconesses described. We have a number of Scriptural descriptions of elders and eldership responsibilities. Also, we have guidance as to how the consecrated members of an ecclesia are to be determined, who, if anyone, should be elected to the service of elder in their Ecclesia. We then have the process outlined for us. We hope to consider these matters along with a number of other observations.

We want to make a few simple points first. The understanding of the ecclesia organization is a present truth, a harvest truth. It's a concept that had been largely lost sight of during the long history of the gospel age after the days of the Apostles until the Lord's return, and the great cry, "*Come out of her my people,*" Revelation 18:4, in part. We have learned that since 1874 we are living during the time of the harvest, which is the end of the age. There was to be a great sickle of present truth to divide and gather the Lord's wheat from the nominally Christian tares, but where to gather them? We read that one would be left at the mill and one taken, one would be left in the bed and one taken. But where are they taken? They are taken, so to speak, to gather together with other faithful Bible vultures or eagles to the carcass of present truth, to be fed of the Lord. We have learned that our returned Lord gave his brethren the means by which they could free themselves from the shackles and chains of the long-standing man-made doctrine and practice of the clergy and laity system. It is a system practiced by almost all the various denominations and almost all of the non-denominational churches as well. Satan used ambitious men to interfere with the ecclesia arrangement over time. In Revelation 2, verses 6 and 15, this is referred to as the Nicolaitan spirit, that is, to Lord over. How did the Lord give us this means of freedom? He gave us the biblical truth as to what is the church. It is the consecrated and spirit-

begotten brothers and sisters, true disciples of Christ. They are the called out ones, the sanctified ones, there is no earthly membership or organization to join, rather, to those who have responded in their hearts and minds to this basic understanding of discipleship, it has been granted to understand from a topical study of the ecclesia arrangement, from the Scriptures, and to then create such an organization as best they are able. This arrangement is to allow and provide the means for God's true children to worship him and study His word with the intention of a continual growth in knowledge of His will as found in His Divine Plan of the Ages. Then they are to conform themselves to his service.

His service includes, first, to better understand his plan, and then to share it with others to find prospective members of the Bride of Christ as well as to be a witness of the glad tidings to all that hunger and thirst after righteousness. They are to *"bind up the brokenhearted"* with clear simple messages of why God has permitted evil and what good purpose it serves. By the knowledge and experience that gives the human family now, they can benefit in the future during a long-awaited kingdom of God. This service brings peace and joy to all who cooperate with His ways. The ecclesia arrangement is God's way of providing a spiritually safe and edifying means by which young babes in Christ might grow and develop into strong mature Christian soldiers of the cross. They are to work together as they strive to make their calling and election sure. The fundamental elements of being a Christian are some of the fundamental elements of eldership. For example Jesus had taught that all the spirit begotten should consider themselves as equals, Matthew 23 verses 6 through 12. Speaking with the Pharisees, quote, *"And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, (7) And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. (8) But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. (9) And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. (10) Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. (11) But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. (12) And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."* Here we learn that we have only one Father in heaven and that he is equally Father to us all. Also, we have only one master, that is Jesus the head of the body. Furthermore we learn that in heavens view, those that are to be considered the greatest are those who serve the most, or in other words, those who serve us cost them the most. Remember the lesson of the widow and her two mites. She cast in the temple treasury all that she had, so then, what we learn from Jesus's words here is that no one, including elders, are to be considered as superiors to their brethren.

The office or role of eldership is to be respected in the church as a role that has

unique responsibilities, however, the brothers that are elected to fill that role are to be considered as just one of the brethren like all others, though hopefully matured as Christians. In these verses, once again, we learn that servants of the Lord and the truth are to be of humble mind, that is, they are not prideful or self-willed. While this is true for all the Lord's people, yet it is especially true for those who are in an eldership position of responsibility. The parable of the pounds also teaches that each of the Lord's servants is given one pound. This represents that we each start with an equal standing or foundation in our relationship to the Lord. The pound represents our vitalized justification with God. It is based upon our faith in Jesus as our Ransom price, and in our complete consecration and vow to be dead to self will and alive to do God's will. Not only is it important for the elders to remember this equalizing aspect for themselves, also they are to include this as a fundamental part of their teachings so that all the brothers are encouraged to remember this about each other.

Yet the parable of the talents teaches us that each servant is given at least one talent and some others more talents. The Lord expects each servant to faithfully use what they have been given even though some have more talents. The Lord does not expect anyone to do more than they can, He also does rightly expect us to do all that we can with what we have. For the elders this, too, is applicable. It may very well be that an elder might have only one talent, but if he does have only one then he should be demonstrating that he is using that talent and not burying it in earthly ambitions. Likewise an elder who might have multiple talents needs to be demonstrating that he is wisely employing those talents in the Lord's service and not just using one or two talents to serve the Lord, and then using his other talents in serving the flesh, for this would not be a faithful example to the flock. Another fundamental aspect of being a Christian is to develop a Christ-like character. To this end we are instructed to transform the way in which we think, act, and talk in ways that would be guided by the Holy Spirit influence. We are given examples of this in numerous Scriptures, but I will sum it up here by saying that it is the various fruitage of the spirit: kindness, patience, long suffering, gentleness, meekness, and love that we are working on to give the New Creature the control of our thoughts and conduct. We will talk on this aspect further along, but for now we can readily say that this is the leading aspect of what the qualifications of eldership are. Elders' conduct and speech reflect the fact that the fruitage of the spirit has been ripening in them for some time.

Another fundamental aspect of the Christian way is to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy acceptable unto the Lord. Yes, to suffer for Christ's sake in little ways, as well as more difficult ways, is what we are called to do. We have entered

upon a covenant of sacrifice, but each of us are to determine how we are going to do this. Here again, we should expect to see evidences in an elder that he is giving up, at least to some extent, human ambitions and comforts in favor of serving the Lord and His people and cause. A list of fundamental aspects of Christian development might go on, but I want to conclude with these: doctrine, prophecy, and practice. These are all related to the study, and reflect of thinking on the Plan of God as found in His word. This is, in fact, how we know the God we worship, and how we are expected to serve him. This is how we know how and what to witness to others about His plans and purposes for the human family. Every Christian is to have studied and thought out their beliefs so that they can be intelligently grounded in their faith; So also the elder should do. They are to be well versed in the word of God and to be able to demonstrate to others from Scripture the plans and purposes of God so as to be able to provide the fundamental building blocks for a true faith. They should be able to teach others how they also might be able to do the same to the best of each one's ability. Even though all brethren are on an equal standing with God, yet He knew that the ecclesias would need proper leadership and order. We read about this in First Corinthians 12 verse 28, quote: *“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, (public expounders), thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of languages”* We learn from this verse that it is God who has established the organization for his church. Let us consider the order: **first** the Apostles - there are only 12 Apostles of the lamb. Revelation 21:14 Some of these wrote our New Testament. They alone are infallible in their writings. **Second** prophets or public speakers. These are those who helped to spread the word of God that established the church. **Third**, Teachers are those who would be the local leaders in conducting the meetings We learn that it is through this arrangement that the church was established and since then has been maintained. After these three the following are miraculous gifts of the spirit, which were useful to assist the early church while the New Testament was being written and distributed by the Apostles. After that was accomplished these miraculous gifts all ceased. This serves to demonstrate the importance of doctrine and practice over miracles. Again in Ephesians 4 verses 11 and 12 quote *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:”* We note that no miracles are mentioned here, rather we have our instructions that after the twelve apostles, the church will be blessed with brethren who have their various talents to be used to assist their fellow brethren in their making of their calling and election sure. The prophets or public expounders and evangelists seem to represent those most engaged in the outward witnessing aspects of the ministry. The pastors and

teachers are more often related to the ecclesia arrangement services. These pastors and teachers would be represented in the elders; it is the elders that the apostles instructed us to choose, from among our own local brethren, those whose lives and teachings are best understood. We want to note that in the Scriptural history of the Book of Acts, we can read that the early church had multiple elders in the various ecclesias. This is true particularly in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus ecclesias. We note that there is no mention of any chief elder. I'm going to read a list of Scriptures, Acts 15 verses 4, 6, 22 and 23; Acts 16 verse 4; Acts 20 verse 17; Acts 11 verses 16 through 30; and Acts 12 verse 25. It is not our focus today, but we want to mention deacons in Acts 6:1 through 6. We can read of the first need for deacon services, and we learn that it is for the temporal affairs and concerns of the ecclesia. The Scriptures instruct us on how the ecclesia should demonstrate their choice of the elders and deacons, this is by the laying on of hands. The Greek word means to stretch forth, or to vote, or a hand-reacher. In fact, this is the common form of voting today, that is, to raise the hand. We can read in depth on this in the Sixth Volume Studies in the Scriptures, pages 283 and 284. Regarding voting, the apostle Paul cautions us in 1 Timothy 5:22, quote, "*Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.*" Here we learn that we do bear a responsibility for whom we support with our vote. Brother Russell comments on this in the Sixth Volume page 285, which I quote in part: "a laying on of . . . hands upon a fellow-laborer in the vineyard would signify his approval, or endorsement: so that if the man turned out poorly in any respect, Timothy would share in his demerit. He must, so far as possible, make sure that he did not give his influence to introduce one who would do injury to the Lord's sheep, either morally or doctrinally. No risk should be run; caution should be exercised either in giving a letter of recommendation or a public endorsement in the form of a public God speed. The same advice is still appropriate to all of the Lord's people in proportion to the degree of their influence." end of quote. In connection with voting we want to consider Acts 14:23 "*And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*" The word ordained means to elect by stretching out the hand. (Young's Analytical Concordance), or a hand-reacher or voter by raising the hand (Strong's Concordance). The thought is clear, the apostles were establishing the method by which the church throughout the remainder of the Gospel Age would signify and determine who would be elders, and deacons, in the ecclesia arrangement. A further insight to the method of choosing elders and deacons is found in Titus 1 verse 5, quoting, from the Ferrar-Fenton translation "*I left you in Crete for this purpose that you might set affairs right upon a permanent basis and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.*" end of quote. We note this phrase "permanent basis," this means that Paul was

wanting Titus to visit the various ecclesias and teach them “how do we elect elders” as had already been done much earlier as recorded in Acts 14:23 as we have seen; it was by voting with the hand. We want to note that it would not make sense to have Titus choose elders for each city or ecclesia for when he was gone, and the 12 apostles were gone, who would then have that kind of authority? In fact, it is the ecclesia members themselves who are to have the authority and responsibility to vote for their elders and deacons.

Now we want to consider the qualifications for eldership from the Scriptures. Now read from First Timothy 3 verses 1 through 7 *“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop (elder), he desireth a good work. (2) An elder then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; (3) Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; (4) One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (5) (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) (6) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. (7) Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”* First we learn that desiring the service is proper if done from a sincere heart, we read that there is to be demonstrated a minimum level of honesty and righteous living noticeable to those who are believers and those who might not be. He should demonstrate a willingness to open his house or in some other manner demonstrate that he is willing to share what he has with others. Not a practicing alcoholic nor even one who uses much wine, alcoholic beverages including beer. Not a violent man. Not one who expects financial gain for his service. One who has shown patience when confronted with conflict. Not a man who readily argues needlessly and in a rude manner. Elders should be content with what the Lord has allowed them to have, not an improper desire for what others may have. In his own home there should be a minimum atmosphere of peace and order, but not a tyranny. An elder should not be new in the Truth or new in his consecration vows. It is far better to try to choose those that have had some time in the way. This is so that they have some experience in both victories and in failures of Christian living so as they have a more seasoned and balanced understanding of themselves and of others. The restriction that an elder should be the husband of one wife is interesting - this seems to be both a better relationship as it had been in Eden which God had at the first established as well as illustrating the symbol of Jesus Christ as the bridegroom and head of the church his future bride. However, we want to relate that it does not imply that an elder has to be married for this would be contrary to the apostles Paul’s advice in First Corinthians the seventh chapter. We read further on the

qualifications in Titus 1 versus 6 through 9 From a combination of the NIV and Diaglott translations, quote, *“If anyone is irreproachable, a husband of one wife, having believing children that are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient, for it is necessary that the overseer be irreproachable as he is entrusted with God’s work. Not self-indulgent, not quick-tempered, not a wine drinker, not violent, not eager for base gain, rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, self-controlled, upright, holy, self-governed, maintaining the true word in his teaching, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it”* end of quote.

We want to consider just the few additional point that Paul makes here. If we were not clear on this already, the role of eldership is to be considered as a part of God’s work. The context of this phrase is meant to emphasize the necessity of a brother having at least at a minimum of righteous behavior. He should be one who makes a real effort at living in harmony with God’s laws and ways. Well, Paul wrote, in First Timothy apt to teach might best mean that a brother is able to explain in a clear manner the doctrines of God. Yet here Paul is clearly writing that an elder must be clear in the truth so that he can present the truth faithfully and effectively. We will consider this more shortly. We will continue to consider the Scriptures in this matter. But let me state here that the best Bible study aid on this topic can be found in the Sixth Volume pages 244 to 252. In the Question Book pages 246 and 255. Brother Russell brings out that the apostle in writing to Timothy and Titus has outlined the qualities of a perfect man. The brethren and are to use his words as guidelines in their considerations but not to expect that any brother would completely be able to live up to the highest interpretation of these qualifications. In the Question Book on page 235 Brother Russell gives a wonderful statement of what might be what might be considered the most important quality of an elder but let us not forget that we shall not know how to write in the hearts of others what we have not already had written in our own heart, hence the propriety of great caution in the choosing of elders. To find those who already have the writing of the Lord in their hearts and who therefore will be competent assistance under the Holy Spirit’s influence, guidance, for the writing of the Lord’s character-likeness in the hearts of the younger brother.

We want to consider the apostle Peter’s advice to the elders as found in First Peter 5 verse 1 through 3. From the NIV, quote *“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: (2) Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; (3) not Lord ing it over*

those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” End of quote. Peter is using the picture of being a shepherd, one who has responsibility to care for and watch out for the Lord’s flock. How sobering this should be? His instructions are to do this as a grand privilege of service, and that the best way to do this is to be an example of how Christians should try to live daily. Furthermore, elders should demonstrate how Christians should be able to study and come to an accurate understanding of God’s Plan of the Ages. This is how each of us can be assured of having a correct knowledge of God our Father whom we serve, each in our own little way. I want to emphasize, if an elder is to be an under-shepherd of the flock, an overseer, then by definition, he would have to be regularly there around the flock.

Brethren, we want to now consider a number of related verses. Hebrews 13:7, 17, and 24 from the Diaglott, quote: *“Remember your leaders those who spoke to you the word of God And viewing attentively the results of their conduct imitate their faith.”* (17) *“Obeying your leaders and be submissive for they keep watch on your behalf Is going to render an account so that they may do this with joy and not with groanings For this would be unprofitable to you.”* (24) *“Salute all your leaders and all the saints Those from Italy salute you.”* In these three verses the King James Version uses the words “have the rule over you” and yet the Diaglott renders it “leaders,” rendering “leaders” is more accurate, accurate from the Greek. The term leaders is a much better understanding of what Paul is trying to express. In these verses we learn that the elders or leaders are to be an example of faith both in their teachings and in their lives. We also have the sense that they should feel a certain amount of responsibility before God in how they are doing their service - Are they seeing any positive outcome from their efforts to promote Godliness? Are they seeing any growth in the understanding of the brethren in spiritual matters? It is certain that God is holding everyone individually accountable for their own development but a part of this is that the brethren should be observant of whether or not those brothers that they have laid hands upon to be leaders, elders, are, in fact, living according to Paul’s instructions, at least to some degree. The point of brethren and being submissive to the leaders does not imply any sense of Lordship by the leaders. Rather in harmony with the rest of Scripture, it denotes that the brethren should be cooperative with their leaders, not overly fault-finding, because those in the eldership role have to say and do a lot of work in preparing for and in conducting all the various meetings and services that the ecclesia has. Also, they must do any other work which may come to them. In fact, it is not unusual for elders that have the talent as pastors to have a lot of requests for counseling. This requires their listening to, praying over, and studying out possible Scriptural

advice and cautions, most of which is, by nature, confidential, and therefore unknown by the other brethren.

Now we will consider Paul's further instructions found in First Thessalonians 5:12 and 13 from the Diaglott: "*But we entreat you brethren to acknowledge those who toil (labor) among you, both presiding over you in the Lord and admonishing you and to esteem them very highly in love on account of their work. Cultivate peace among yourselves.*" The King James Version uses the words "are over you in the Lord" which can have the misguided thought of a form of Lordship. Actually as the Greek renders it, "presiding over you in the Lord" has the correct thought of someone being a leadership role having the duties committed to them by the ecclesia as their guidelines as to what they should be at work doing. In these verses we read that Paul is encouraging the brethren to both take note of and appreciate the elders that are actually laboring on behalf of them and the Lord's cause. Not by unseemly ego-inflating flattery, but rather by exhibiting a cooperative and polite interaction during the various ecclesia meetings and activities. Accusative tones of voice by anyone is not helpful, nor are insinuations, playing the devil's advocate, or other negative manners of speaking.

We read of similar expressions by Paul in First Timothy 5:17 from the Diaglott: "*Let the elders who preside well be esteemed worthy of double honor, especially those who toil (labor) in word and teaching doctrines.*" Here again we read of the elders presiding that is how their work is described. Again, the appreciation is for those elders who, in fact, are faithfully working to assist the brethren, not in temporal matters, although that, too, may be useful at times, but rather it is the spiritual work to assist the New Creatures in their understanding of what it means to be a Christian, in every sense of the word: how we are to live, think, and act, What are Scriptural guidelines to assist us in our decision making? What are the Scriptural guidelines for meetings, Ceremonies, The memorial, Baptism, Weddings, Funerals, and so forth. What is the Plan of God for each of these creatures? How do we know Jesus as the perfect man and as the New Creature? What are the important prophecies? How do we understand them? and so much more as found in the word of God? We can read on these verses in the Sixth Volume pages 251, 300 and 301

Now we will turn our attention to the Scriptural statements regarding the elders having sound doctrine laboring in the doctrine, and the true word in his teachings. We find it very interesting to note that neither the apostle Paul or the apostle Peter gave us a list of the required doctrines and prophecies. They did not even include that the elders have to believe in the ransom or Jesus as their savior. No, all these

fundamentals were assumed to be understood and believed in. The apostles rightly expected that those brethren who would make up the ecclesia would themselves understand that a minimum of doctrinal and prophetic comprehension would, of course, be required for any brother they would be laying their hands on to be their teachers, their leaders, their under-shepherds, their overseers. Yet in addition, it just may be that as more truth would become known and available to the church during the Gospel Age, more minimum doctrinal and prophetic understanding would be reasonably expected. For example, today we have many Bible translations, Bible helps, and in fact the Harvest Message which helps us to understand the Bible and God's Plan of the Ages better than at any former time in history. We are living in the day of our Lord's return, and with many more prophecies having been fulfilled, we naturally, and I believe correctly, are to expect our elders to understand more than the elders of the previous six stages of the church's development during the Gospel Age. However, we do have a few Scriptural examples of doctrines that the apostle Paul expected mature Christians to understand. In Hebrews 5 verses 12 through Hebrews 6 verse 3. I'll read from the NIV, quote: : *"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! (13) Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. (14) But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! (13) Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. (14) But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb 6:1) Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, (2) instruction about baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (3) And God permitting, we will do so."* Paul is being constructively critical of the brethren, he has observed a lack of zeal of some of their study of the Divine Plan of the Ages at least the parts that have been revealed at each stage of the church. Note that it is not enough to just have the basic fundamental true doctrines of original sin which results in death, and that there is a means of repentance to God through Jesus his son, our savior, that we have concentrated as symbolized by baptism, that there is the hope of the resurrection of eternal judgment, that there is a future day of judgment for all that come forth from death. Yes, Paul is stating here that all of that as wonderful as it is is only the milk of the word, in fact to be a teacher one should actually be much more fully developed in their spiritual senses, And we can find

part of that for the development the meat in the Book of Hebrews itself. What do we find in Hebrews? We have the doctrine of the sin offering of Jesus, our high priest, and the offering of his body members, the underpriests. We find a wonderful understanding of the types and antitypes of the priesthood, the tabernacle structure, the animal sacrifices, the sealing of the covenants, the required sufferings of Jesus and his church to be perfected as New Creatures as he was. We learn of the Ancient Worthies and the importance of faith that is testified to by works. We learn a sonship to God. We learn of our elder brother Jesus. We learn of the purpose of our chastisements, and we learn so much more. Brethren, I submit that those whom we might consider to be elders, teachers, mature Christians, should have a minimal understanding of and a minimal ability at least, in how to present the strong meat Paul here is giving to the church for our higher spiritual development. More than that, why would we want less from our teachers?

Let us consider Paul's words to the brethren in Second Thessalonians 2, versus 1 to 5 *“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the parousia (presence) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, (2) That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. (3) Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of destruction; (4) Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. (5) Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?”* End of quote. Here is an example of Paul all chiding the brethren that they were being deceived on these prophetic matters of Christ's presence and the day of Christ that there would be a man of sin exalting himself as God, and how much more should we expect from our teachers living now when the truth of the papacy and its line of popes and so forth has been clearly exposed in the light of present truth; even the reformers clearly saw this matter.

Again in First Thessalonians 5 versus 1 through 4: *“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. (2) For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. (3) For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. (4) But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”* Yes, Paul is listing a number of prophetic matters that he told those brethren and expected them to understand it. How much more so should our teachers understand the day we are living in? So then, brethren, what are we to conclude? Paul gives us the qualification list of conduct and behavior of elders. Elsewhere he gives us lists

of some of the fundamentals and more advanced doctrines and prophecies that mature Christians are reasonably expected to understand. I would add, especially now in this day of our returned Lord and the provisions of Bibles, Bible aids and the Harvest Message. For myself, the harmony is that Paul is warning the church that just because a brother may have a good knowledge of Scripture but does not have a mature character as a Christian, he should not be used in the leadership role. Having been passed over, perhaps his character development would improve with time and experience. One thing is for certain, Paul is not advising the ecclesias to just elect nice brothers to be their overseers.

We will read in a number of places in the Harvest Message of Brother Russell thinking and suggestions. The Sixth Volume page 245, quote "It should be attested by a godly life, (this is speaking about elders), humble demeanor and spirit of self-sacrifice; by an absence of all scheming for honor and filthy lucre, as well as by teaching which would stand the scrutiny of thoughtful Bible study-- searching the Scriptures daily to see whether or not their presentations fully accord with both the letter and spirit of the Word." End of quote. Here we read of a minimum of life and teaching for eldership being mentioned.

In the Sixth Volume page 327 and 328 under the subheading Let Every Man be Fully Persuaded in his Own Mind Romans 14:5 we read in part "Each having used his opportunity, each is to trust to the Lord to guide and teach and show the truth, and should not insist that all must be made to see every item as he sees it, nor even as the majority view it. "On essentials, unity; on non-essentials, charity," is the proper rule to be followed. We agree, however, that every item of truth is important, and that the smallest item of error is injurious, and that the Lord's people should pray and strive for unity in knowledge; ::page 328:: but we must not hope to attain this by force. Unity of spirit on the first basic principles of truth is the important thing; and where this is maintained we may be confident that our Lord will guide all possessing it into all truth due and necessary to him. It is in this connection that the leaders of the Lord's flock need special wisdom and love and force of character and clearness in the Truth, so that at the conclusion of each meeting he who has led may be able to summarize the Scriptural findings and leave all minds under their blessed influence- expressing himself clearly, positively, lovingly--but never dogmatically, except upon the foundation principles." End of quote. In the foregoing quote, we read of Brother Russell's suggestions regarding meetings. He describes the liberty it should have and yet the responsibility of the leaders to be able to summarize the expressions that best represent the Scriptural statements and reasonings. Yet there should be done in a manner that will be at the same time clear and loving. This implies that the leaders

need to have clarity and understanding the word of God and the Divine Plan found therein.

Most Bible students are familiar with how important the final month of Brother Russell's earthly ministry was for those of us remaining. That was the month of October 1916. As Brother Russell graduated from the school of Christ on October 31st, 1916. We read in the 1916 forwards to the Six Volumes of Studies in the Scriptures that they are dated October 1st 1916. Their importance lies in the fact that they conveyed to us his latest thinking on the contents of each volume. They also include his added insights gained about his living long after the volumes were originally written, the last one, the Sixth Volume, being written in 1904. Also, in that he lived past 1914 or 1915, and he saw the outbreak of World War I, we believe that the Lord kept Brother Russell here two years past 1914 in order to give us further insight that would carry us onward. The last Watchtower magazines carry certain articles of special importance to us. I must also say, I think it was especially trying to forewarn the brethren then living of the immediate spiritual dangers and trials they were facing. He expected these trials would probably increase in the days ahead. We will quote from three of the last five issues, The last issue in December, 1916 mostly relating his earthly passing and related events. In the October 1st issue, Reprint number 5967 there is an article entitled The Epistle of Christ. Brother Russell is quoting from the apostle Paul that the most important work is having a Christ-like character written in our hearts. It is, in fact, the most important writing of all. He states that the brethren in choosing their elders should be wise in choosing those brothers who display this writing of a Christ-like character in their own hearts to be seen, at least somewhat, by others as their leaders. If they have not written this kind of character within themselves, how can they help the younger brethren to do that which they haven't? We can all agree that this is indeed sound advice. It is later in this article on page 5968 that he writes in part, quote, "And what is the Message, what is the Epistle, that is written in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through various agencies? Is it the knowledge of chronology? Is it the unraveling of types and shadows? Is it the cracking of hard theological nuts in respect to differently understood passages of Scripture? Is it the knowledge of the history of the Jews, the history of the world, the history of the Church? Is it the understanding and appreciation of the different Covenants, past, present, and to come? No, it is none of these.

All of these subjects have more or less of value, and are more or less used of the Lord in connection with this writing that is to be done in the hearts of His people. But writing the Epistle of Christ is different—the writing, the tracing of the character-likeness of the Master in the hearts of His people—His meekness, His gentleness, His patience, His long-suffering, His brotherly-kindness, His love, His

joy, His peace”.End of quote. We think it is easy to understand Brother Russell was not writing that doctrinal clarity, typical understanding of the divine Plan of the Ages, was not necessary for the elders to know and comprehend, rather he was emphasizing that unless that knowledge and understanding had had the Lord ’s intended effect of allowing for the proper development of a character likeness to Christ, then the knowledge was not properly applied to those individuals hearts. Some might quote this reprint as if Brother Russell was downplaying correct doctrinal prophetic understanding, but that is not the case.

Next we want to consider reprint 5981. 5981. From the November 1st, 1916 issue entitled The Hour of Temptation. We intend to provide here this entire article in a pdf. It is a very thoughtful and long article. Brother Russell felt that he had to write this article as a warning to the brethren worldwide. So quoting from reprint 5981 November 1st 1916 issue entitled The Hour of Temptation. It is a very insightful and long article Brother Russell felt that he had to write this article as a warning to the brethren worldwide and he writes, quote: “It causes real grief to write that much of the difficulty and danger to the Church seems to lie at the door of the Elders and Deacons—not all, thank God, but apparently a small minority of them, judging from the queries which come to the Office from time to time from the bewildered sheep, who seek advice as to their proper course.” Brother Russell goes on to write about how ambitious men and sometimes ambitious women try to pervert the election process for themselves and their friends. They also writes that it is the ecclesia that is to be blamed if they allow such persons as their leaders, he calls it sin. I quote “The selection of improper leaders is evidently a sin, and quite a reflection against the Classes who have the improper leaders” end of quote. In this article on page 5982 He even writes regarding the possible need for a class to divide under the subheading entitled REMEMBER DOCTRINAL TESTS ALSO We read, quote “Repeatedly Bible Students write us that their Elders try to hinder them from the use of the WATCH TOWER SOCIETY’S publications as textbooks in Bible Study. Some of these Elders go so far as to tell the classes that they are out of harmony with many of the things in these textbooks. Sometimes, as rulers, they forbid the use of these in the classes. We are asked what should be done under such circumstances.

We reply, Let those who wish to follow such leaders do so—that is their right. We shall wish them well. But let us not follow with them nor submit for a moment to such arrangements.” End of quote. Further on, Brother Russell writes the following quote “We have not given such strong advice heretofore; but we perceive that many of the dear sheep are being troubled, hindered of development and imposed upon.” End of quote. This is remarkable and unique We each should read and reflect on this entire article appropriately named The Hour of Temptation. Still

further on we quote, “The lesson to us is that no matter how great, no matter how able any brother or sister may be, this will not make such fit to be a leader of the Lord’s people unless he have additionally the all-important items—first, a knowledge of the Lord’s Word; and second, the possession of a good degree of the spirit of Truth—one who always dare be trusted as an ambassador of the Lord. None others should be recognized as teachers or leaders amongst the Lord’s people.” End of quote. In the same article Brother Russell brings out the V.D.M. questions. first V.D.M means *verbi dei minister* in Latin. It means a minister of the divine word. Brother Russell states that this is exactly in accord with the Bible regarding every representative who preaches in public. He goes on to write that he had written out 22 questions that he sent out to the pilgrim brothers they were using, eventually numerous elders and deacons and brother in general were writing to him and asking for the questions. Furthermore the New York City ecclesia had voted and determined that they would not use any brother or any brother as an elder or deacon who could not reasonably answer the questions. Brother Russell then suggests that all the classes should follow such a course. I want to direct your attention to the last three questions. Number 20, quote “ Have you read thoroughly and carefully the six volumes of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES?” Question number 21, quote “Have you derived much enlightenment and benefit therefrom? Question 22, quote “Do you believe you have a substantial and permanent knowledge of the Bible which will render you more efficient as a servant of the Lord throughout the remainder of your life?” End of quote.

My dear brethren, make no mistake Satan hates the Bible, and Satan hates the six volumes of Studies in the Scripture s because they make plain the Divine Plan of the Ages as found in the word of God. Brother Russell was almost prophetic in this remarkable article. Within 11 years, by 1927, 1928, the last printing was made of the Studies in the Scriptures And by the mid 1920s Judge Rutherford who usurped the authority of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, started to appoint the elders for the very various ecclesias. Very shortly thereafter, the independence of the classes disappeared along with the election of elders and deacons. Truly those Bible students who did not defend their liberty to study the Bible with the help of the Studies in the Scripture s and other writings of the seventh messenger, soon lost their way and the vast majority even gave up the hope of the High Calling. They accepted only a hope of being resurrected with the remainder of mankind on the earth. When Brother Russell wrote the 1916 forwards to the Volumes in October and when he had written apparently in October 1916 some of the articles that would be printed after his human death, they were printed in the November issue of the Watchtower magazine. From that time to the mid 1920s, barely 10 years, Judge Rutherford and the so-called headquarters of the Watchtower Bible and

Tract Society would appoint elders of their choosing to preside over the independent ecclesias. Many of the ecclesias rejected these assigned elders and they had to stand alone, separate. Those brethren, those brothers and sisters who faithfully defended their liberty in Scripturally choosing their own elders and deacons from their midst, they are our forefathers of independent Bible students today. By 1927, 1928, 11 years after his earthly graduation the Watchtower stopped printing the Studies in the Scriptures and thereafter discouraged the use of Brother Russell's writings.

Now, returning to our script, in our day there are those who claim to have read the Volumes and gained much blessing from them, however actually they spend more time and effort to undermine portions of what the Volumes present from the Scriptures. They work to undermine the Seventh Messenger as a biblically indicated authority that the Harvest church should expect.

Our last observation is from the November 15th issue in 1916 of the Watchtower. In responding to a question in a letter, Brother Russell writes this. Quote, "It is our experience that no matter who does the preaching nor how much of it is done, very few will be brought to a satisfactory condition of knowledge or of character unless they read for themselves Studies in the Scriptures, the Watchtowers, and so forth." End of quote. My brethren, did you hear this point? At the end of his ministry Brother Russell once again demonstrates that a proper knowledge should lead to a proper character and that these both are best attained by personally reading and studying the word of God using the Studies in the Scriptures for guidance.

In closing, no one has brought out any new doctrine in over 100 years. Our returned Lord has given us all that we have needed. Are we busy making it our own? Are we using our knowledge to assist us in transforming our characters into a Christ-like image? Are we busy examining the Scriptures for our instruction and our inspiration? Do not be content with just accepting what someone else says that the Six Volumes teach, read them for ourselves, if at all possible. And to the elders I say, use for yourselves the Studies in the Scriptures, Tabernacle Shadows, and other Harvest Message helps. This is the very best way to enable you to help the Lord's flock to make their calling an election sure.

May the Lord add his blessing.