



BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP **A REVIEW OF SPECIFIC ISSUES**

Introduction

In *Biblical Eldership*, Alexander Strauch appeals to the church to re-evaluate traditions and misconceptions concerning eldership and to return to biblical leadership principles, restoring elders to their rightful place in the body of Christ. Strauch devotes passage after passage in each of his chapters to supporting the multiple-elder concept in each local church and to presenting the biblical pattern for the local church. This is an excellent work, providing a biblical basis for the functioning of multiple elders in the local church.

Concerns with Strauch's Position

Distinction of Elders

In his work, Strauch's interpretation of a couple of passages creates concerns. Consider the following:

Strauch writes that "In the New Testament, there are no separate classes of elders...that the entire eldership pastors God's flock, not just one pastor" (p. 247). This pastoring (shepherding) involves a body of elders guiding and protecting the local church through instruction from the Scriptures (p. 197). To stress the equality or oneness of this body of elders, Strauch indicates there is not a teaching elder (or pastor) plus a body of ruling elders (p. 247). Holding the view that all elders are pastors, he legitimately makes the distinction from 1 Timothy 5:17 that in that equality "some elders...give themselves to the flock in a fuller, more sacrificial way" (p. 239). Those who are more committed (dedicated or diligent) are worthy of double honor.

From 1 Timothy 5:17, Strauch further makes the distinction in eldership by stating, "Also, some elders have greater personal ability and gift and are simply more skilled at their task" (p. 239). Strauch's distinction is based upon the assumption that a larger group of elders rules at different levels of commitment, and that a smaller group of elders, out of the larger group, does the ministry of word and doctrine. Those who are more gifted (preaching and teaching) are "especially" worthy of double honor.

Strauch's explanation of his second distinction of 1 Timothy 5:17 fails to address a number of issues. First, the superlative adverb "especially" does indicate that some elders are particularly deserving of double honor—making a distinction among elders. But that distinction is again based upon diligence in ministry, as indicated by the word "toiling" or "working hard." Just as some ruled "well," compared with others, so too some "toiled," compared with others who did not. The comparisons are in diligence, not in abilities. How elders do what they do is the issue in this particular verse. Second, Strauch's assumption that there is a smaller group that specializes in the *real* ministry of word and doctrine is disputable. Frankly, in a diligence context, the same group, not a larger and than smaller group, addresses the issue more appropriately; those who are diligent in both ruling and teaching are worthy of double honor. Third, the distinction in giftedness or abilities is not the issue of the verse. The verse assumes all elders minister in the same activities. The only distinction is in the manner in which those ministries are conducted—diligently or not.

Giftedness of Elders

Strauch writes that "no special spiritual gift is listed as a qualification or requirement for elders" (p. 242). He further indicates that though "all elders are equal in the one office" they have different personal giftedness and ministries (p. 248). Noting, however, in the list of elder

qualifications that “all elders must be ‘able to teach,’” he relegates this ability of elders to be “able to open their Bibles and instruct others” (p. 197). Consequently, his view is that all elders are able to teach *somewhat*, but that this has nothing to do with the gift of teaching or preaching (pp. 197, 198). Strauch then writes, “Some, but not all, elders will have the ‘gift’ of teaching as is emphasized in 1 Timothy 5:17,18” (p. 198).

Strauch’s explanation of elders’ non-giftedness also fails to address a number of issues. First, Paul uses the word *teacher*, or its derivative, eleven times, seven of which occur in the Pastoral Epistles (the books on church leadership). A word study seemingly indicates that “able to teach” refers to the ability to teach—*skilled at teaching*. To indicate that the gift of teaching is not addressed is therefore questionable. Second, one must ensure that the current culture and practices do not press a passage beyond its intention. The one man “preaching from the pulpit” culture can create from a passage expectations that are not there. Third, Strauch concludes that because not all elders have the gift of teaching, only the smaller group of elders in 1 Timothy 5:17 would be required to have personal giftedness for ministry in the word and doctrine. If “able to teach” *does* refer to the gift of teaching, however Strauch’s conclusions about 1 Timothy 5:17 would be incorrect, and all elders would be required to have that gift.

Conclusion

This book is a valuable tool for re-thinking the biblical concept of elders, for understanding the necessity of multiple elders, and for implementing eldership within the local church. However, as previously discussed, Strauch’s desire for equal, multiple eldership goes only so far. He ends up with equal, multiple elders in some functions or ministries, but not in all functions or ministries. As a result, we have one, or some, who are “first among equals” and therefore not equals (p. 248). In Strauch’s view, all elders lead/rule, but only one or some of those elders, those having personal giftedness, “preach” or teach. *LeaderQuest*, believes this view misses the spirit and intent of both 1 Timothy 3 and 1 Timothy 5. *LeaderQuest* addresses these two concerns and provides a better explanation in *Plurality of Elders: Change, but No Change* Article.

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