

Where are the elders?

In Ephesians 4: 11 we read that the ascended, glorified Christ gave gifts to His bride – ***apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*** – for the work of equipping the saints that they might do ministry and that the body of Christ might be built up. These must be very special **gifts** that cannot be duplicated by man. The latter two interest me – they have their ministry within the local assembly – and are surely the domain of elders. These are Christ’s gifts to the church and we should be diligent to recognise them. Deacons are also to be men/women of deep Christian character, but they are appointed by the church for the practical work of ‘running the church’. The only difference I see between elders and deacons in Paul’s description of 1 Timothy³ and Titus 1 is that the former are “apt to teach” – and they are appointed by Christ, not by men.

Sadly, when I look at so many churches today, I see elders ‘promoted’ from good deacons, or appointed because they have some standing in the local society, or they have been to Bible college/seminary, with little evidence that the Lord has gifted them as elders to the church. I understand the dilemma many churches have to appoint good elders for they seem to be very rare these days! Where are the men (women?) of deep spirituality upon whom a pastor can lean for accountability, counsel and spiritual help? Where are those whose (divine) authority is recognised by all in the church when it comes to matters of discipline or guidance?

Too many pastors consider themselves as elders simply because they have been through some training (Bible School/ seminary), but there is little evidence of anointing on their ministry (a sure sign that the Lord has not appointed them!) Younger pastors need the mentoring, covering of a Christ-given elder, such as Timothy and Titus received from Paul. I know too many churches that struggle, because they are led by men whom Christ has not appointed to lead, operating under a delegated authority rather than the divine authority of God’s anointing. Such men, though good men, are the “thieves and robbers” of John¹⁰, having climbed into the sheepfold by a way other than by Christ.

Whenever I have been asked to look after a church for a few months, the first thing I do is seek out the local elders to whom I can be accountable while there – and usually they are not even on the church board!

As additional reading see my article ***Elders and Deacons*** under “Teachings”.