

# The Elder Trap

By Dr. Dan Cheatham, [www.devotional.net](http://www.devotional.net)

IT IS MY SINCERE TRUST THAT GOD WILL USE THIS TRUTH TO HEAL AND RESTORE HIS PRECIOUS, PRECIOUS PEOPLE AND RESTORE HOLY SPIRIT ORDER AND HARMONY IN CHURCHES. The teaching here is offered not as rigid dogmatic doctrine, but rather as a possible healing tool as we all journey together into our discovery of Bible principles.

## WHAT IS THE ELDER TRAP?

One of the saddest things in the modern church today is what I will call the ELDER TRAP. Let me explain.

In the natural, cream rises to top of the milk. In the local church, the cream of zealous believers also rise to the top. In short, the ELDER TRAP is what happens when neither the pastor nor the "cream" men of a local church have scriptural revelation as to what an elder really is. Tradition says an elder is a "spiritual man in the church". However, the Bible teaches that an elder is a called, separated, gifted, ordained minister of the gospel. If you study the verses of scripture listed at the end of this booklet, you will clearly discover that an ELDER = pastor, teacher, or five-fold minister = feeder = leader = overseer = shepherd = bishop.

An assistant pastor of Dr. Larry Lea's 10,000 member Church on the Rock says that the scriptural precedent is ordained five-fold ministry eldership and that lay eldership church government is looking for trouble for all persons involved. He says that if the scripture gives room for lay eldership, it is definitely the exception, not the rule. Dr. Kenneth Hagin, who has personally ministered to thousands of Spirit-filled churches, says that full gospel churches almost always lose their power and anointing when the church government is in the hands of a deacon board or lay elders. Dr. Hagin says that the local church government heads up in the office of Senior Pastor. He says that during the "infant stage" of the early New Testament churches lay elders were sometimes the only alternative to leave new converts with leadership after evangelistic campaigns. God had not had time to develop an abundance of five-fold ministers as later revealed in Ephesians Chapter 4. He says that to revert back to lay elders in this stage of the development of the church would be a mistake since we now have an abundance of ministers compared to the beginning of the church 2000 years ago.

## SO HERE IS THE ELDER TRAP SCENARIO.

A pastor who is not familiar with this truth appoints lay elders with complete sincerity and integrity of heart. Often this is set up where the pastor and each of the elders have one vote on church decisions. This arrangement is double trouble. For a while the lay elder church staff works fine. And of course God always blesses as much as He can within the limits of our revelation knowledge. But at some point both the elders and the pastor get badly BURNED. Here is the paradigm: God has anointed the pastor as the decision-maker, but the pastor feels he can't make a decision without the elders' vote and/or approval. Unfortunately, God has not called the lay elders into the ministry. Rather than being GOD-APPOINTED, they are MAN-APPOINTED. So at some point they will not be able to see things from the ministry perspective. So the pastor hears from God on some key thing. But the lay elders don't feel they have from God on it. The lay elders feel the sincere responsibility (but false burden) to "check and balance" the pastor. Plus, they have gotten comfortable with their influence and authority in the church, so they are reluctant to change their minds when they haven't heard from God on the issue. Gradually the pastor feels frustrated because he feels the elders are putting the "brakes on" what he is hearing from God. David made the same mistake when he brought the ark back to Israel.

David had the right motive, but the wrong method. He attempted to bring the ark back on a cart and when a MAN-APPOINTED man reached out to keep the ark from falling off the cart, he got BURNED and died. Both

David and the man were perfectly sincere, but they attempted to do the will of God "out of due order." After withdrawing for a period to study the scripture, David discovered that only GOD-APPOINTED men were authorized to carry the ark. (I Chronicles, Chapters 14 and 15).

Back to our scenario: Now the elders are disillusioned as to their roles and responsibilities and can't understand why the pastor doesn't see it their way. Hence a perfect trap for hurt feelings, a church split, wounded sheep, and a wounded shepherd. All of this because the devil has blinded people from one nugget of truth - that an elder is a gospel minister, NOT a responsible lay person.

Now after pastor and elders have parted ways, the pastor is hesitant ever to "trust" again. The "cream men" who were the lay elders now carrying with them a wounded heart, feeling like they "failed" God. Many of these precious people who got "set up" by the devil for the lay elder trap become disillusioned with ministers. Some become "gun shy" to ever really "get involved" in a local church again. Some fear that if they ever put their whole self into a church again, they will experience the same rejection and disappointment. Some get involved in another church but then begin manifesting a controlling spirit because of their bitterness towards ministers or an inability to relinquish the prestige and power they had in their former church. It is now hard to be a follower once they have tasted being a leader, especially since their prior experience with a pastor brought disappointment. Hence the "elder trap" that kills the "cream" again and again. All along these cream men could have been pillars in the church and used of God as supernatural deacons. (Deacons are helpers: they are decision-implementers, not decision-makers, they are Holy Ghost suggesters, the pastor's right hand men that make up the core of committed men, the faithful few, the inner circle). But instead, lack of knowledge (not lack of enthusiasm or sincerity) caused them to be exalted into a realm for which God did not call them. The devil exploited their willingness to serve and to say "yes" to responsibility in the kingdom. Now these men are paralyzed and UNABLE TO GO FORWARD BY A CONSTANT LOOKING BACKWARD.

BUT PRAISE GOD, THERE IS INNER HEALING AVAILABLE! THERE IS A BALM IN GILEAD! THERE IS A PHYSICIAN! THERE IS STILL A GOD THAT CAN TURN A CURSE INTO A BLESSING! GOD IS A GOD OF RESTORATION! GOD IS THE GOD OF NEW BEGINNINGS. GOD IS THE GOD OF ANOTHER CHANCE. Now that you know the truth, the truth can set you free! Note that in Genesis 20, God restored King Abimelech even though he had taken Abraham's wife, preparing to marry her. Abimelech took Sarah in the innocency of his hands and THE INTEGRITY OF HIS HEART because he didn't have KNOWLEDGE. He didn't make the mistake intentionally. Actually it was Pastor Abraham's fault more than his own. But now that God gave him proper knowledge, repentance and restitution were in order. God said to Abimelech and his is saying to you today, "YES, I KNOW THAT THOU DIDST THIS IN THE INTEGRITY OF THY HEART!" If you can see how the devil set you up then you are 95% on the way to healing. All you must do now is repent of not conducting church affairs "in due order" and make verbal restitution to the other wounded parties if any of your behavior was wrong. And I also recommend that you submit yourself to a man of God who has knowledge of this truth that he might offer prayer for you and encourage you in counsel. NOW YOU MAY GO FORWARD WITH YOUR CHRISTIAN WALK WITHOUT EMOTIONAL OR SPIRITUAL SCARS. YOU CAN MARK IT ALL UP AS EXPERIENCE AND "RISE AGAIN" TO FRUITFULNESS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, this time "in due order" without taking on burdens that are too heavy, yokes that are too hard, or stepping into another man's spiritual office.

### **Scriptural Basis For Elders & Deacons:**

Philippians 1:1 KJV - Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to **all the saints** in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, **with the bishops and deacons.**

In the above scripture, Paul speaks of three categories of Christians, three functional groups within the local church. Saints, Bishops and Deacons. (Humor: Hopefully the Bishops and Deacons are Saints too! Ha!)

To understand what a true Elder is, one must let the bulk of scripture interpret and balance itself. No one

scripture verse by itself completely defines what an Elder really is. Obviously the choice of words that is used in the New Testament for this spiritual leader automatically gives us an initial word picture. The fact that "elder" is used in the New Testament interchangeably to denote a Christian leader and also in other contexts to denote an older person, shows us that a leader is someone with more influence via their experience, age, training, or anointing.

But I propose that the scripture makes very clear what an Elder truly is.

**Elder = Bishop = Pastor = Overseer = Spiritual Leader = Ephesians Chapter 4 Five-Fold Minister = Ordained Minister = Preacher/Teacher:**

From all the scriptures I read, there is no such thing as a "LAY ELDER." An "ELDER" is undoubtedly a CALLED and SEPARATED Man or Woman of God, upon whom the anointing of God to FEED and LEAD rests. Carefully consider these scriptures:

1 Peter 5:1 KJV - "The **elders** which are among you I exhort, **who am also an elder**, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; **Feed the flock** of God which is among you (**NIV: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care**), **taking the oversight** thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the **Chief Shepherd** shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

1 Timothy 3:1 KJV - "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an **overseer (NIV and NLT: elder, MSG: provide leadership in the church)**, he desires a noble task." 1 Timothy 3:2 NLT - "For an **elder** must be a man whose life cannot be spoken against. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exhibit self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home and must be able to teach."

1 Timothy 2:1,2 AMP - "THE SAYING IS TRUE and irrefutable: If any man [eagerly] seeks the office of **bishop (superintendent, overseer)**, he desires an excellent task (work). Now a **bishop (superintendent, overseer)** must give no grounds for accusation..."

Acts 14:23 KJV - "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."

1 Timothy 5:17 NIV - "The **elders who direct the affairs of the church** well are worthy of double honour, especially those **whose work is preaching and teaching.**"

In the above verse, it does seem to allude to the fact that there are some elders whose work is NOT to preach and teach. This is about the only verse I can find that might justify one thinking that there is such a thing as a LAY ELDER. However, many elders' jobs in a local church may be more administrative or in counseling, so I lean towards thinking that this verse is referring to those leaders as opposed to a layman.

Now when I delineate between a LAYMAN and a CALLED MINISTER (commonly coined "clergy"), I am NOT drawing that difference as to whether they are in full time employed ministry as opposed to secular employment. Even Paul the Apostle was secularly engaged in his trade of tentmaking for periods of time while he was still in the ministry. Rather I am drawing the distinction between the two, not by employment status, but rather by THE CALL AND THE ANOINTING RESTING ON AN INDIVIDUAL THAT QUALIFIES THEM TO BE A LEADER AND FEEDER of God's people. A layman should NOT be in charge of governing a local church. A God-touched mouth is still the acid test of whether a person is called to the ministry. Of course, the scriptures also list character traits that either qualify or disqualify a person as well. But just because someone is a good leader in their secular profession DOES NOT qualify them to lead God's church. GOD HIMSELF

decides whom to call and anoint to lead. To usurp and replace God's callings and giftings is a serious matter that can stunt the spiritual growth and direction of a local church at best, or cause God to withdraw His hand of blessing altogether, at worst.

Acts 20:28 NIV - "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with His own blood."

Ephesians 4 lists five ministries that are commonly known as the FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, **PASTORS** and teachers. Below is a lexicon definition of the Greek Word translated "PASTOR."

"Pastor - 4166 ποιμην ποιμεν ποι-μανε'; TDNT-6:485,901; AV-shepherd 15, Shepherd 2, pastor 1; 18

1) a herdsman, esp. a shepherd

1a) in the parable, he to whose care and control others have committed themselves, and whose precepts they follow

2) metaph.

2a) the presiding officer, manager, director, of any assembly: so of Christ the Head of the church

2a1) of the overseers of the Christian assemblies

2a2) of kings and princes

++++

The tasks of a Near Eastern shepherd were:

- to watch for enemies trying to attack the sheep - to defend the sheep from attackers - to heal the wounded and sick sheep - to find and save lost or trapped sheep - to love them, sharing their lives and so earning their trust. During World War II, a shepherd was a pilot who guided another pilot whose plane was partially disabled back to the base or carrier by flying alongside him to maintain visual contact."

**Pastoral Leaders (Elders) may be male OR FEMALE:** Examples are Deborah who was the Judge of Israel (Leader), Esther a Queen, Anna The "Prophetess" of Luke 2:36, Priscilla a Co-Pastor with her husband of their church, found in 1 Corinthians 16:19. Modern Examples are Aimee Simple McPherson, Kathryn Kuhlman, Marilyn Hickey, Joyce Meyers, Elaine Hollmer, and many others. The Bible clearly states in Acts 2:38 that God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, on His SERVANTS (men) and HANDMAIDENS (women) and that "THEY" (Both the men and the women) would prophesy (preach, teach and move in the gifts of the Spirit).

## **What is a Deacon?**

Here is the Easton's Bible Dictionary expansion of the Deacon: "Anglicized form of the Greek word diaconos, meaning a "runner," "messenger," "servant." For a long period a feeling of mutual jealousy had existed between the "Hebrews," or Jews proper, who spoke the sacred language of Palestine, and the "Hellenists," or Jews of the Grecian speech, who had adopted the Grecian language, and read the Septuagint version of the Bible instead of the Hebrew. This jealousy early appeared in the Christian community. It was alleged by the Hellenists that their widows were overlooked in the daily distribution of alms. This spirit must be checked. The apostles accordingly advised the disciples to look out for seven men of good report, full of the Holy Ghost, and men of practical wisdom, who should take entire charge of this distribution, leaving them free to devote themselves entirely to the spiritual functions of their office #Ac 6:1-6. This was accordingly done. Seven men were chosen, who appear from their names to have been Hellenists. The name "deacon" is nowhere applied to them in the New Testament; they are simply called "the seven" #Ac 21:8 Their office was at first secular, but it afterwards became also spiritual. Both Philip and Stephen, who were of "the seven," eventually preached and later became leaders; they did "the work of evangelists.""

So we see that the word "Deacon" really means a "RUNNER", or a "SERVANT." Deacons are NOT then, called to GOVERN the local church, but rather to assist the pastoral staff (elders, or what is commonly called in the New Testament, a "presbytery") in carrying out the work of the Gospel. Deacons then, are NOT to be the decision makers in a local church, but rather key helpers, assistants, and department heads who carry out the

vision of the senior pastor and pastoral staff. Deacons may obviously be decision makers in their respective areas of responsibility, but not the overall guides of the local church congregation. It is wrong for a lay "Deacon Board" to run a church; this is unscriptural. Likewise it is wrong for a similar arrangement called an "Administrative Board", to govern the local church.

### **Deacons may be male OR FEMALE:**

Romans 16:1,3,12

Phil 4:2,3

1 Timothy 3:11

1 Timothy 5:9,10

Titus 2:3,4.

In these passages it is evident that females were then engaged in various Christian ministrations. The early church father, Pliny, makes mention of them also in his letter to Trajan (A.D. 110).

### **WHAT IS AN ELDER?**

Jeremiah 3:15

Philippians 1:1

Jeremiah 10:20-21

I Timothy 3:1-7

Jeremiah 23:1-4

I Timothy 5:17-22

Ezekiel 34

Titus 1:5-11

Acts 15:1

I Peter 2:25

Acts 20:17-31

I Peter 5:1-5

Ephesians 4:7-16

II John 1

III John 1