

– Continued from page 1 –

leaders, but not to appoint leaders other than elders who meet the requirements of the office.

Since nothing is directly taught in Scripture about congregational decision making sans elders, the church must take guidance from general principles set down in the New Testament.

Not Every Function Requires a Business Meeting

Paul the apostle instructed the young evangelist Titus, *“Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you”* (Titus 2:15). Similarly, the young evangelist Timothy was told to *“command and teach”* (1st Timothy 4:11). A preacher is already authorized to preach; he need not ask anyone’s permission, even elders, to present *“the whole counsel of God”* (Acts 20:27).

Bureaucracy must not stand as an obstacle to the church’s material work either. The Corinthians were told, *“I urge you, brethren — you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints — that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us”* (1st Corinthians 16:15-16). If the church is Scripturally authorized to engage in a certain work and there are members willing to take up the task, then others need to comply with them however they may be needed.

Deference to the Aged Is Fitting

In the Law of Moses, it was written, *“You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am Jehovah”* (Leviticus 19:32), and the present covenant requires, *“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders”* (1st Peter 5:5). Age is no guarantee of wisdom (Ecclesiastes 4:13), but it is a more likely source than the inexperienced (Proverbs 16:31; 1st Kings 12:1-19). Older men deserve to be heard before younger men who should listen attentively and respectfully.

Unanimity Should Be Pursued in Matters of Liberty

From the earliest days in the church, *“the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul”* (Acts 4:32) and this is how churches were taught to behave throughout the New Testament. Four times, brethren are urged to be of the *“same mind”* (Romans 12:16; 1st Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 3:16; 4:2; 1st Peter 4:1) and five times to be of *“one mind”* (Romans 15:6; 2nd Corinthians 13:11;

– Continued on page 3 –

– Continued from page 2 –

Philippians 1:27; 2:2; 1st Peter 3:8). Oneness of heart, soul, and mind suggests unanimity ought to be the goal.

Democracy, the notion that fifty percent plus one should decide a question, may not be a prudent course in non-essentials because weak consciences can be wounded. *“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.... Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved”* (1st Corinthians 10:23-24, 32-33). Within the realm of that which is lawful are things that are helpful and things are unhelpful. Knowing this, it is better to avoid offense. *“We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves”* (Romans 15:1). In the presence of uncertainty, it is not appropriate to press an agenda that Christ does not require. *“Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak... And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ”* (1st Corinthians 8:9, 11-12). So, *“all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility”* (1st Peter 5:5).

Consensus Suffices in Matters of Necessity

Whereas unanimity is best in discretionary issues, matters of spiritual necessity may be adequately handled with a mere consensus.

The church in Corinth was obligated to discipline a brother who persisted in immorality (1st Corinthians 5), and Paul later told them, *“This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient”* (2nd Corinthians 2:6). Had the congregation waited for immature Christians to fully comprehend what had to be done and why, then the punitive action would have been delayed and lost its efficacy (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Accommodating weak consciences has no place in matters of such gravity.

When Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, *“they had appointed elders in every church”* (Acts 14:23). The word translated *“appointed”* in English comes from a Greek word meaning *“to vote by stretching out the hand”* (Thayer). Thus, when elders are installed in the church, a majority decision is enough. Their work is too

– Continued on page 4 –

**"WHAT MUST I DO
TO BE SAVED?"**

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"THE ASSEMBLING OF
OURSELVES TOGETHER"**

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard

Belén, New Mexico

Seekers Welcome.

Members Expected.

**"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN
ANY TRESPASS...
RESTORE SUCH A ONE"**

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

– Continued from page 2 –
important to be prevented by a minority.

While a majority may suffice in matters of spiritual necessity, nevertheless, unanimity is still preferable and an objective worth pursuing. When the circumcision question was considered in Jerusalem, *"it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch"* (Acts 15:5). As much as possible, let the whole church agree.

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 13

MARCH 31ST, 2024

CONGREGATIONAL DECISION MAKING

Bryan Matthew Dockens

The Holy Spirit intends for elders to oversee each church as shepherds of God's flock (Acts 20:17, 28; 1st Peter 5:1-4). Such men must meet lofty qualifications of character and experience (1st Timothy 3:1-7). Until such time as they are appointed, the church is *"lacking"* (Titus 1:5).

That lack is inevitable whenever a congregation is planted, but it must be recognized as a temporary condition until there are *"elders in every church"* (Acts 14:23). When Moses had judged Israel forty years, God informed him of his imminent death and his plea was not for his life, but for his people, beseeching the Almighty, *"Let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of Jehovah may not be like sheep which have no shepherd"* (Numbers 27:16-17). Likewise, a church that is without elders needs to pray ceaselessly that qualified men may be duly appointed.

Meanwhile, it is fair to wonder how the church is to accomplish its work without the leadership God intends. The church must conduct itself *"decently and in order"* (1st Corinthians 14:40), but it ought not go about that orderliness by establishing a system of leadership contrary to that which the Lord has already directed (1st Samuel 8). It is fair to carry out the mission of the church in the absence of qualified

– Continued on page 2 –

RIO GRANDE VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

505-864-0282

rgvcoc@gmail.com

Box 989, Belén, NM 87002

www.RGVChurchOfChrist.org

75 Sherrod Boulevard

Facebook.com/RGVChurchOfChrist