



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“We are considering appointing Elders and Deacons, and we know that they must have certain scriptural qualifications before they can be appointed, but are there any other qualities which we ought to look for in these proposed leaders?”

Over the years there has been a school of thought which argues that the scriptural qualifications are the only ones that matter, but I have long held the view that if such brothers purport to lead communities of christians, then they should possess qualities of leadership in addition to the scriptural qualifications which are so essential. In our search to find enough scripturally qualified people, we have perhaps neglected to look for these other qualities, and indeed, it may very well be that we are not fully aware of the other qualities which may be desirable in the more efficient management of the Church; if this is so, then a little investigation may help us.

What is the Local Assembly?

On the face of it, this may seem a ridiculous question to ask, but I believe that we need to answer it if we are going to say anything useful on this subject.

The so-called local assembly, as I understand it, is a community of christians who have been ‘called out’ by the gospel and who assemble together for worship, teaching and proclamation of the gospel. The community is comprised of individuals who, when assembled, comprise a corporate body. That body has a task, namely to carry the evangel to people in surrounding areas. Because there is an objective to be achieved, and because that objective has to be achieved by people, both individually and corporately, leadership is absolutely essential. Moreover, christians have a further goal, that of living their christian lives in such a way as will be pleasing to our Heavenly Father; in an alien and sometimes hostile world, they will need guidance. Many times such guidance will be spiritual by nature; sometimes it will need to be of a practical nature, but whichever may be necessary, it will be best given by informed leadership.

The Leadership Role

In his approach to his task, he the leader, should appreciate certain things (i) what he himself should BE (ii) that he will need to control situations, and not let situations control him (iii) that in order to be more effective as a leader he must learn what he has to DO.

He should also know the main areas in which he has to operate. These are areas of need; needs which he as a leader should endeavour to satisfy at all times. These needs are relative to (i) the task (ii) the group (iii) the individual. In satisfying these needs he will have to plan, explain, control, support, inform and evaluate. In achieving the results which both he and God require, he will have to ensure that the community works well together as a group, and that each individual plays his maximum part. These are not inborn traits as some people may imagine, but they are skills which can be recognised, practised and developed.

Jesus as Leader

It is true to say that the Bible abounds with examples of men who had to exhibit qualities of leadership. We think of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Saul, David, Peter, James, Paul, to name only a few. When we examine the ministry of the Lord Himself we immediately understand some of the problems with which He was confronted. The Lord had a task to perform; as He said when He prayed to His Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). In order to assist Him in the accomplishment of this task, it was necessary for Him to choose people to help Him; initially, He chose a group of twelve men, and what a diverse group they were. What Jesus had to do was to weld this group into a unit which would travel with Him during His ministry, and also prepare them for the preaching of the evangel and the leadership of the Church through the difficult and turbulent years following its inception. We only need to examine the behaviour of some members of that group in order to understand the problems which the Lord had in explaining His work, controlling some of their irresponsible desires, supporting them in their obvious weaknesses, and planning and executing those things which He knew had to be but which they understood imperfectly. How those early disciples withstood temporal authority and cruelty, political exploitation, blatant opportunism from so-called spiritual men, and through it all led the Church to its future glory, is a standing testimony to and a glorious reflection of the excellence of the teaching, training, and leadership of the Lord.

Instructions from Paul

It is interesting to see how Paul maintains that which the Lord had already begun. In Acts of Apostles chapter 20 we have a record of him speaking to the elders of the church whom he had called to him from Ephesus. After recounting his own personal experiences and work to them, he gives them a specific instruction, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (v28). There are two important points which I want to draw out from this instruction, 'Take heed unto yourselves', and 'Feed the church of God'. These, I believe are standing instructions to the leadership of the Church for all time, and the Church has suffered because of their non-observance.

'Take heed unto yourselves'. I wonder how many church leaders have set aside this instruction by Paul? Is it true to say that those who have fulfilled the scriptural qualifications see no need to improve themselves in other skills in order to meet the declared objectives of the Church. how long is it since such men asked themselves, "Am I clear about my own responsibilities and authority"; 'Do I know what the community is trying to achieve, and have I explained how we are going to achieve it'; 'Do

my own work and behaviour standards set the best possible example to the group of people I purport to lead'; 'Are there any inter-personal skills I need to develop in order to do the Lord's work more effectively'? I believe that questions such as these, coupled with the same desire as shown by the apostle in his care of the Church, will enable church leaders to analyse and measure themselves against the standard set by Christ.

'Feed the church of God'. How often have hungering souls asked for bread and have been fed a stone? It is the bounden duty of spiritual leaders to see to it that the flock is adequately fed. Obviously, this must be done from the Word of God, and as constant and regular feeding is a necessity in the physical sense, so this is true in the spiritual sense.

The leader, then, must have the capacity and the understanding to guide the flock through the lush, green pastures of God's Word. He must know the appetites of those he leads, and he must see to it that they feed on the right food. Some will need milk; others, strong meat. He must watch their growth as tenderly and with as much concern as the mother her child. He must be an able teacher.

In addition to this he must tend the flock. Paul said, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" Tending embraces those other acts of which the leader must be capable; protecting, disciplining, restoring, giving material assistance and support to individuals, facing up to unpleasant issues. All of these things are embraced in the teaching, but the greatest task is to feed, because if this does not take place then the Church will not grow.

In conclusion I would say to the questioner, 'Search out men with the scriptural qualifications; these are primary and essential. Look for some of the leadership qualities I have mentioned; these are very desirable. Are you looking for very special men? My answer would be, 'Yes, you are'.