

MAINTAINING GOOD CHURCH ORDER

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have prayed and read the Bible for this lesson to learn what the Holy Spirit wants you to teach your students. Then let Him guide you in using these notes. When you follow this procedure you will be a better teacher of your students.

Lesson Aim: Develop and maintain good church order by following God's instructions in His Word.

Suggestion: Have the students read the Scriptures and answer the questions in the student lesson. Insert questions that fit your lesson aim for class discussion. Use the ones below where appropriate.

Introduction: God wants all things to be done "decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40), because that is the nature of His character. He has a plan for everything and He does nothing haphazardly or without a plan. For that reason His churches should be conducted in good order to maintain His approval. This is done when the churches follow His plan that is given to us in the Scriptures. So Paul told Titus, "I left you in Crete that you should set in order the things that are wanting" (Tit 1:5).

How can we have confidence in God's promise to give us eternal life? 1:2

God is truth, His promises are truth, and He cannot lie. The Bible is the Word of God, the very breath of God. All Scripture is inspired of God; it is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16). The Holy Spirit guided the writers of Scripture so that the words that they wrote in the original language were the truth. That gives us confidence that God's promise to those that receive His Son as their Savior have eternal life. "As many as received Him, to them He gave the power (authority) to become the sons (children) of God" (Jn 1:12).

Who are the elders in the New Testament? 1:5

Elders were the leaders or rulers of the people. There were elders among the Jews that opposed the apostles (cf Act 4:4, 8, 23), elders among the Christians that led the churches (cf 1 Tim 5:17, 19) and elders in Heaven that worshipped God before His throne (cf. Rev 4:4, 10). Five different names were given to a man who led a church. He is called an elder (*presbuteros*), related to an older man (*presbutus*), giving respect to him as a mature, wise leader; a bishop (*episkopos*) who oversees and guards the church (1 Tim 3:1); a pastor (*poimen*) who shepherds and cares for the flock of God (1 Tim 4:11); a preacher (*kerux*) who declares the Gospel; and a teacher (*didaskalos*) who teaches the Word of God. Paul called the leaders from the church in Ephesus both elders and overseers (Acts 20:17, 28). Peter referred to these men as elders, shepherds and overseers (1 Pet 5:1-2). The New Testament did not have the practice of one or more elders over one church and a bishop over a group of churches.

Did Paul give Titus the authority to ordain elders? 1:5

A casual reading of the Scripture might lead one to believe that Titus was told to ordain elders in every church in Crete. However, Paul said that the elders in Ephesus were ordained by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). Evidently Paul told Titus that he was to ask God to lead him to a spiritually mature man that the people respected and ordain him to lead a church.

What does it mean that an elder must be "the husband of one wife"? 1:6

This rule has caused much debate among good men who want to obey the Lord. Many believe it forbids a man from being an elder who has been married twice. Some would apply this rule to those who have more than one wife. Few would apply this rule to a man whose wife died and he remarried, but many would apply this rule to a man who was divorced for any reason and he married another wife. However, some believe the Scriptures would allow a divorced man to be an elder if his wife left him and she married another man. This would set him free from the law and he could marry another woman (1 Cor 7:15). Others would allow a divorced man to be an elder, if his divorce occurred before he was saved. When he was saved, he became a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17); his sins were forgiven and none were imputed to him (Rom 4:7-8); and the blood of Jesus cleansed him from all sin (1 Jn 1:7). They would point to Paul, who wrote this rule to Titus, and ask how could he persecute, imprison and murder God's people (Acts 8:1; 9:1-2), and yet be chosen by God to be His apostle to the Gentiles when he committed these things? Paul would say that he did it in ignorance before he was saved (1 Tim 1:13). So the Lord would treat a man that was divorced before he was saved as He treated Paul. He could serve Him as an elder in a church.