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# JUBILEE YEAR!

**Malcolm H. Watts**

The Lord Jesus regularly attended the synagogue on Sabbath days. Luke tells us that, after the close of his first Judean ministry, he went back to his hometown of Nazareth to be present at the morning service. The worship proceeded as normal, with psalm-singing, a reading from the Law, and the offering up of prayers; and then our Lord stood up, indicating that he wished to read the Scriptures.

A synagogue official - probably the Chazzan - handed him the scroll of Isaiah. Our Lord appears to have unrolled the scroll to the place which had been marked. Then he read the passage appointed for that service. It was from Isaiah, chapter 61, and it could hardly have been more appropriate: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised...' The last line was the climax of the whole. It declared that Messiah had come 'to preach ***the acceptable year of the Lord***' (Lk. 4:19).

The allusion is almost certainly to the year of Jubilee, described for us in *Leviticus, chapter 25*.

That year would have come immediately to mind because it was generally known as 'the great year'. As a divine institution, the Jews recognized it as the 'year of the Lord'; but it was also an 'acceptable' year because God regarded it as a suitable time to grant favours. One of these was the freeing of Hebrew slaves, which explains why the Jubilee was called 'the year of liberty' (Ezek. 46:17). In the light of the prophet Isaiah's imagery - 'deliverance' and 'liberty' etc - there seems to be a very definite reference to Jubilee year.

In the Jewish Calendar, Jubilee occurred after seven weeks of years and therefore every fifty years. It was in every way a remarkable appointment, designed to foreshadow the blessings of this day of grace and the glorious period of Gospel deliverance. Hence, looking forward to our times, the same

prophet speaks of 'the *year* of (God's) redeemed' and he equates the '*acceptable time*' with the '*day of salvation*' (Isa. 63:4; 49:8). The apostle Paul confirms that this time of grace has now arrived. 'Behold', he says, 'now is *the accepted time*; behold now is *the day of salvation*' (2 Cor. 6:2).

Since the year of Jubilee was typical of this present age, it will be profitable to examine more closely Scripture's description of it. Before doing that, however, one or two preliminary observations should be made:

The year of Jubilee was appointed by God. The law pertaining to it began as follows: 'Thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years,...And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year...' (Lev. 25:8,10); and, in the same way, God has ordained that there should be a gospel age and he even moved Old Testament prophets to predict it, saying, 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord...' (Jer. 31:31).

Now Jubilee began immediately after one of the most important of Israel's ceremonial occasions - 'the day of atonement' (Lev. 25:9). On that day, the High Priest offered a sin offering and then entered with the blood into the Holy of Holies, there to appear before the throne of God (See: Lev. 16). It was all intended to typify and foreshadow Christ's atoning work (Heb. 9:11-14), one result of which is, of course, a Jubilee-like period of blessing for men and women everywhere.

Of further interest to us is the fact that the beginning of Jubilee coincided with the opening of a new year. It was 'on the tenth day of the seventh month': that is, the tenth day of Tishri which was actually the first month of the civil year (Lev. 25:9). This is significant in view of the fact that, in this day of grace and through the effective ministry of the Holy Spirit, sinners begin to 'live' and enjoy 'newness of life'. 'Behold', writes the apostle, 'all things are become new' (2 Cor. 5:17).

A requirement in the law regulating the Jubilee was that a trumpet had to be blown to announce its arrival. God said through Moses: 'Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound' (Lev. 25:9 - Note: 'Jubilee' seems to be derived from a Hebrew word meaning 'ram's horn' or 'trumpet'). The blowing of

a trumpet is elsewhere figurative, representing the preaching of God's Word and, more particularly, the preaching of the Gospel (Isa. 27:13; 58:1; Hos. 8:1; 1 Cor. 14:8) and it is apparently to the sound of the Jubilee trumpet that the Psalmist refers when he says, 'Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound' (Ps. 89:15). Think of the parallel for a moment. What powerful preaching introduced this present Gospel age! Why, Paul could say of those first preachers, 'their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world' (Rom. 10:18).

This detail deserves a further comment. God's Jubilee blessings were to be proclaimed without reservation and without restriction. The trumpet was to be blown - the proclamation was to be made - 'throughout all your land' (Lev 25:9,10). Why was the announcement made everywhere? It was because the blessing was available to everyone. It is the same with the Gospel. Ministers are sent to proclaim it freely. They should feel no embarrassment at all about this. They should feel not in the least inhibited. What did our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ say? 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mk. 16:16). 'Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations' (Lk. 24:47).

There can be no doubt that Jubilee was special: in fact, it was said to be sacred. God said, 'Ye shall *hallow* the fiftieth year' (Lev. 25:10). He meant that it was to be 'set apart' for the purpose which he had in mind, so that men and women could claim his gracious benefits. They could do that during the year of Jubilee - but *only* during that year. Now, in these times, God has once again appointed a season of mercy and once again he has fixed its limits. How long it will continue, who can tell? We do know, however, that some will foolishly let the season pass and will try to be saved when it is too late. One day 'the door' will be 'shut' (Matt. 25:10). The Lord Jesus solemnly said, 'Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able' (Lk. 13:25).

Yet notwithstanding it is important to stress that the Jubilee was a full year. 'Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year...a jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you...' (Lev. 25:10,11). How richly was grace displayed during these months! Thousands upon thousands came into blessing of God. In these Gospel days, God has similarly extended his period of mercy. Why? Because he wills that many

precious souls should turn to Christ and be saved. 'The Lord is...longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (2 Pet. 3:9). The Lord Jesus did not quote the whole of Isaiah's prophecy because it was not necessary to his purpose to proceed any further. It is noteworthy, however, that Isaiah spoke of an 'acceptable year' but of a mere 'day of vengeance' (Isa. 61:2 cf. 63:4) and it appears to suggest that God's pleasure is to save rather than to judge. 'He delighteth in mercy' (Mic. 7:18).

At the Jubilee the people were wonderfully blessed; and their blessings strikingly resembled those which we receive in this Gospel age.

**1. Debts of every kind were cancelled.** Israelites who became poor and were unable to pay their debts might be compelled to sell themselves as servants, but in the Jubilee year they were freed from all their obligations. As one commentator puts it: 'The millstone of debt was to be removed from their necks'. '*If thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee...he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubilee: and then shall he depart...*' (Lev. 25:39-41). This prefigures the blessings imparted by the Gospel. As men and women, we owe God perfect obedience and, on account of our non-payment, we now owe a debt of punishment to the divine justice (Matt. 6:12; Rom. 2:5; 6:23). The good news is that Christ has assumed his people's liabilities and, through his obedience and satisfaction, believers can be forgiven all their sins. 'We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace' (Eph. 1:7).

**2. Deliverance and freedom were obtained.** Through reason of poverty, some people in Israel were subjected to service and even to bondage, but the year of Jubilee brought release. This applied to Israelite and non-Israelite alike (Lev. 25:39-41, 47 and 53,54). God required his priests, with the blast of their trumpets, to 'proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof' (Lev. 25:10). This surely points to the liberty secured by Christ and received by faith (Read again: Lk. 4:18,19). People everywhere are in bondage to the guilt and power of sin, the terrible and all-consuming wrath of God, the rigour and curse of the moral law, the fear of death and the grave, and the judgment which results in everlasting damnation (Jn. 8:24,34; Rom. 1:18; 3:19;

Heb. 2:15; Rev. 20:12-15). Yet to every believer there is the promise of complete release. 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed' (Jn. 8:36).

**3. There was rest from burdensome labour.** Even though a sabbatic year had just closed, the Jubilee brought exemption from toil. There was to be no agricultural work. The land was to lie fallow. God's law was quite specific about this. 'A Jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed' (Lev. 25:11). In this 'rest' we have an illustration of the 'rest' or 'peace' which the Saviour gives. The prophet Isaiah foretold it when he wrote of the Messiah, and said, 'his rest shall be glorious' (Isa. 11:10). Christ himself, however, spoke most plainly of it when addressing those who 'laboured' for salvation and who were 'heavy-laden' with guilt. He said: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11:28 cf. Heb. 4:10).

**4. Abundant blessings were made available.** Since the land lay fallow in the sabbatical year as well as in the Jubilee year, the Lord granted heavy crops in preceding years to provide for all their needs. No-one suffered any lack during the Jubilee. 'I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years' (Lev. 25:21). It was as if the curse had been removed. The land became amazingly fertile. This, too, finds fulfilment in the Gospel. Christ is said to have 'redeemed us from the curse of the law' in order that 'the blessing...might come' (Gal. 3:13,14).

**5. People were restored to the families.** By reason of poverty, some may have been separated from their families, but when Jubilee arrived, there was both return and reunion. 'It shall be a jubilee unto you;...and ye shall return every man unto his family' (Lev. 25:10; cf vv 39,40). In spiritual experience, the corresponding blessing is adoption - 'an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God' (The Shorter Catechism). Sin has brought estrangement from God and his Church (Eph. 2:12; 4:17-19), but the moment a sinner receives Christ by faith, he is enrolled among God's dear children with the name and right of a

son. 'As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name' (Jn. 1:12; Gal. 3:26).

**6. Forfeited estates returned to their original owners.** God was understood to be the great land-owner. He had determined who should have the land and he insisted on this restoration of property . So it was that, in the Jubilee, all who formerly possessed land, but who had forfeited it, received that land back again. 'In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession' (Lev. 25:13; cf. v. 10). This corresponds to 'Paradise Lost' and 'Paradise Regained'. Through sin, we lost our title-deeds to heaven (Rom 3:23), but the God of grace, through the redemptive work of his Son, is pleased to place them once again in hands of his believing people. Thus we have an assured hope of 'an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven' (1 Pet. 1:4).

**7. In God's safe-keeping, perfect peace was enjoyed.** It was the promise of God. Whatever the Israelites might have to face in the way of trouble or danger, the Lord assured them that they had no need to fear. He would take care of them. He would look after them. His words to them were: 'Ye shall dwell in the land in safety' (Lev. 25:18). Such a promise belongs to believers in these times. 'Kept by the power of God', the Lord will 'deliver' and 'preserve' them, even to 'his heavenly kingdom' (1 Pet. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:18). We believe in the eternal security of all those who have been chosen, redeemed, and called. We have it from the lips of our Saviour - 'They shall never perish' (Jn. 10:28).

Christ came to introduce the Jubilee. What do you know of its blessings? If you repent of sin and believe the Gospel, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, these blessings shall be yours - now and throughout all eternity!

## FELLOWSHIP NEWS

### Liz Storey

On the Saturday 17 July the Seniors headed down to the beach for a day out. Although the journey down was very slow (due to the majority of the population heading in the same direction on a gloriously hot and sunny day) a great time

was had. Peter & Sue kindly gave them the loan of their beach hut (where lots of hot dogs were consumed) and the rest of the day was spent paddle boarding and swimming in the sea, much to everyone's enjoyment! We thank God that they had a happy time and were kept safe and continue to pray for the group as they have a summer break and look to the Lord to provide for the start of a New Term in September.

Although the youthwork is now on a summer break, lots of plans need to be made for the new term, and we are especially thankful that the Sunday School will be resuming again. Please pray for Tim and the teachers who will be involved in this work. The start date for the Autumn term for Seniors and Sunday School is the Lord's Day 5 September.

The Church has organized a First Aid Training Course for members involved in various aspects of Church Service. It will be held in the Church building on Saturday 16 October but further details will be available nearer the time.

Since the last edition of the Messenger, Nathan & Phoebe D have both undergone operations and we are thankful to know they are making a good recovery. We pray that they will know benefit from their treatments and Phoebe, we especially pray that you will be spared now from further episodes of tonsillitis.

Peter P has also recently been unwell and is awaiting a Consultant's appointment at the hospital to determine any further treatment that he may require.

Carol R has also been in our prayers, as she has been suffering greatly with frequent episodes of vertigo. These episodes are very debilitating and although she has started on some medication the effectiveness is presently quite minimal. Please pray that the appointment she needs with the Doctor will be brought forward and that some relief of her symptoms will be granted to her quickly.

Peter & Sue's niece, Holly was involved in a very serious road traffic accident and we have been much in prayer for her and the family since then. She



sustained a serious head injury and multiple fractures and has been in ICU at Southampton in a critical condition. Sue reports that although Holly is still in a very serious condition, she has been stable enough to have surgery to stabilize her fractures. They are also encouraged by the knowledge that although she is still ventilated, she is breathing a little on her own. We are asked to pray that she will soon be able to be transferred to her local hospital in Reading. The extent of any long-term implications from her injuries, including her head injury are still not known, but the family have asked that we pray that should she need rehabilitation in the future, a place at a Rehab Centre in Oxford would have a bed for her.

For our prayers, Dan Tribe has a number of preaching engagements in the coming months which include, Whiddon Valley Barnstaple on 29 August, Grace Reformed Baptist Church, Hilperton, on 5 September, Uxbridge Road Tabernacle on 12 September and Providence Chapel, Cheltenham on 26 September. We pray too that he and Jenni will know the Lord's leading as to where he would have them serve Him in the days to come.

We are so thankful to God that, in His grace and mercy to us, John Thackway from Holywell has accepted the church's call to him to be our next Pastor. John and Margaret were to move to Salisbury in October. However, this will now be deferred because Margaret needs treatment for breast-cancer. A tumour was recently discovered which can only be treated by a course of chemotherapy over a six-month period, followed by surgery. This will mean, in the Lord's will, they will be moving to us next year. Such an unexpected turn of events surprises us, but we know that the Lord sometimes leads us in mysterious ways. Such "cross-providences" remind us that our times are in His hand (Psalm 31:15), not ours. We bow to His sovereign will, confident that a wise and kind heavenly Father leads us "by the right way" (Psalm 107:7). We assure Margaret of our prayers for the treatment now begun, that the Lord will minimise the side-effects and maximise the benefits, leading to a good recovery. Also, for John, that the Lord will uphold him over the coming months. We also prayerfully remember the church at Holywell. May God richly bless and keep His people there and meet their every need.

## THE PASTOR'S ANNIVERSARY, 2022

We have new dates for the special meeting and services to mark Rev Malcolm Watts's recent retirement and his 50 years as the Minister of Emmanuel Church, Salisbury. This had been planned for earlier in the year, but, due to COVID lockdowns, it proved to be not possible, and it was therefore postponed.

God willing, the new dates will be **Saturday, 26 March, and the Lord's Day, 27 March, 2022**. As before, the Ministers preaching that weekend will be **Revs. Dewi Higham (Cardiff), Maurice Roberts (Inverness), and William Macleod (Glasgow)** and it is hoped that their wives will be able to accompany them for this occasion. All being well, **Rev. John Thackway** will also be present and taking part in these meetings and services.

Please note these new dates and, if at all possible, please join with us at this time, as we remember God's great goodness and faithfulness over the last 50 years.

## THE HAPPY MAN

### Lachlan Mackenzie (1754-1819), Lochcarron

The happy man was born in the city of Regeneration in the parish of Repentance unto Life. He was educated at the school of Obedience. He has a large estate in the county of Christian Contentment, and many times does jobs of self-denial, wears the garment of Humility, and has another suit to put on when he goes to Court, called the Robe of Christ's Righteousness. He often walks in the valley of Self-Abasement, and sometimes climbs the mountains of Heavenly-mindedness. He breakfasts every morning on Spiritual Prayer, and sups every evening on the same. He has meat to eat that the world knows not of, and his drink is the sincere milk of the Word of God. Thus happy he lives, and happy he dies. Happy is he who has Gospel Submission in his will, due order in his affections, sound peace in his conscience, real divinity in his breast; the Redeemer's yoke on his neck, a vain world under his feet, and a crown of glory over his head. Happy is the life of that man who believes firmly,

prays fervently, walks patiently, works abundantly, lives holily, dies daily, watches his heart, guides his senses, redeems his time, loves Christ, and longs for glory. He is necessitated to take the world on his way to heaven, but he walks through it as fast as he can, and all his business by the way is to make himself and others happy. Take him all in all, in two words, he is a Man and a Christian.

## **OUR PRAYERS AND GOD'S ANSWERS**

*I asked for strength and God gave me difficulties to make me strong.*

*I asked for wisdom and God gave me problems to solve.*

*I asked for prosperity and God gave me brawn and brains to work.*

*I asked for courage and God gave me dangers to overcome.*

*I asked for patience and God placed me in situations where I was forced to wait.*

*I asked for love and God gave me troubled people to help*

*I asked for favours and God gave me opportunities.*

*I received nothing I wanted, but I received everything I needed.*

*My prayers have all been answered.*

# ELDERSHIP

**Malcolm H. Watts**

The contemporary trend is away from the New Testament pattern of church order and that is why, as evangelicals, we need to re-examine biblical teaching on this subject.

## **The Headship of Christ**

1). All church-authority belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ (Isa. 9:6,7; Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:18) but He grants authority to duly appointed officers whose function in the church is to see that His Will is done. It is true that the church sets men apart for office but it can never exercise Christ's prerogative and invest men with authority and rule. "Elders", As Dr. John Owen rightly maintains, some "have their power by the church, yet they have it not *from* the church." This is certainly the scriptural position: "*He* gave...some pastors and teachers," (Eph. 4:11; cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:28). Such officers, far from being church delegates appointed to please the majority, are actually the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore accountable to Him. (2 Cor. 4:1; Heb. 13:17). They should at all times remember Paul's words: "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." (Gal.1:10).

2). Since Christ's rule is an absolute monarchy, none can exercise arbitrary control of the church. Once men begin to impose their wills upon the membership, binding consciences to mere opinion and view-point, they usurp the power of the Son of God and are guilty of an attempt to dethrone Him. Christ is King; and, as Dr. Dabney says, "the sceptre of Christ's kingdom is His Word." The duty of those in office is to declare, to administer and to enforce the law of Christ revealed in Scripture: - "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20). Men appointed "over a house" may be "stewards" (e.g. 1 Kings 16:9 — "steward of his house" accurately describes "who was over the house" — margin; Gen. 43:16,19 — the words "ruler" and "steward" in the Authorised Version describe the same officer). This is exactly how it is with church officers. Although "over you in the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:12), they are "stewards of God" (Titus 1:7). In other words,

they have real authority but it is an authority to carry out what is in God's Word - the statute-book of Christ's kingdom.

3). Jesus Christ is "Lord". No-one must ever encroach upon His prerogative by an unreasonable exercise of their power. Men are warned not to act as "lords over God's heritage." (1 Pet. 5:3). The expression is a strong one in the original, conveying the idea of "high-handed rule" or, as it is in the margin, "overrule". It indicates domination and even oppression. Nothing, of course, could be more alien to the spirit of New Testament Christianity. The Lord Jesus Himself said: "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them (the word used in 1 Pet 5:3 and applied in Acts 19:16 to a possessed man "overcoming" others); and their great ones exercise authority upon them (a parallel word, again with the preposition "kata" which supplies the thought of coming "down" on people with authority and power), so *shall it not be among you*: but whosoever shall be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. (Mk 10:42;43; cf. Matt 20:25,26; Lk 22:25,26). In Christ's kingdom, so unlike the kingdoms of this world, the secret of good rule lies not in a "lordly" spirit but in that spiritual and loving leadership which always keeps the best interests of others at heart.

4). Those who rule do so under the Lord Jesus, and they must "rule well" if they are to receive the esteem and respect so vital to them in their work. The apostle says: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour." (1 Tim. 5:17) What is it then to "rule well"? It is to discharge the duties of the office:

1. *faithfully*, making sure that church affairs are regulated according to the laws and rules of Christ (I Cor. 4:2);

2. *willingly*, being motivated not so much by the call of duty as by a sincere desire to care for God's people (1 Pet. 5:2);

3. *diligently*, devoting all possible time and effort to pastoral work within the church (Rorn. 12:8);

4. *humbly*, having a deep consciousness of human weakness and a continual awareness of the need for divine grace (Gal. 6:1);

5. *wisely*, at all times evidencing the spiritual discernment and sound judgment essential to good government (Matt. 24:45);

6. *patiently*, maintaining even under great provocation, a calm and unruffled spirit (2 Tim. 2:24); and

7. *carefully*, always keeping in mind that a strict account of their stewardship has to be given on the solemn Day of Judgment (Heb. 13:17).

These verses impress upon us the demanding nature of the work of leading Christ's Church. All who desire to rule well should recognize, in addition to what has so far been written, that their great responsibility is to the local church which the Lord has specially entrusted to their care: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28).

5). Christ has leaders in His church, and He has invested them with authority. Although the power of government lies with them, it is the Lord's Will that they should act "with the concurrence and consent of the brethren." (New England Confession of Faith, 1680). The church, let it be remembered, is a company of believers joined together by mutual covenant and therefore all its members have responsibilities. The principle of responsible membership is most adequately expressed in "the church meeting". Here the church acts collectively, in accordance with New Testament teaching (Matt.18:17; Acts 1:23—26; 6:2—6; 13:1—3; 15:22; 1 Cor. 5:4, 5; 2 Cor. 1:6—8).

A basic and fundamental truth is that a church, properly instituted, is an assembly of Christians (Acts 2:47; Rom. 1:6; 1 Cor 1:2), some of whom are called to special office (Acts 6: 2-4; 14:22; Phil. 1:1). The officers differ from ordinary members in the following ways: they have been given gifts to qualify them for special service (Rom. 12: 6—8; 1 Pet. 4: 10,11); they have been recognised by the church and formally set apart to specific church functions

(Acts 6:6; 15:5); they are invested with authority, to be exercised for the benefit of all (1 Tim. 5:5, 12 — an authority similar in some respects to that manifested in the home); they have care of the whole church and are responsible for all its members (Acts 20:28; Phil. 2:26); and they give themselves completely to their particular ministries (Col. 4:17; 2 Tim. 4:5).

## Appointed Officers

There are only two kinds of officers: some find specific predictions about this in the book of Isaiah. The Holy Spirit speaks through the prophet with reference to Gospel times, and He says: “I will also make thy *officers* (lit. overseers) peace, and thine *exactors* righteousness.” (Isa. 60:17). There could be a hint here of the two kinds of officers which were to appear in the Christian Church: one to keep spiritual watch and the other to take responsibility for material and financial affairs. In another place, although he uses Old Testament terms familiar to him, he nevertheless seems to suggest the same two kinds of office-bearers: “I will also take of them for *priests*, and for *Levites*, saith the Lord.” (66:21). Priests, as we know, performed the duties of ordering divine worship and generally attending to the spiritual needs of the people (1 Sam. 2:28; 2 Chron. 15:5). The Levites’ task was to “assist” the priests. They looked after the outer part of the sanctuary and acted as musicians, scribes and stewards (1 Chron. 9:19,32; 25:4,5 — “officers” means “writers”; 2 Chron. 35:3-15).

Although this is an example of “New Testament thought cast in Old Testament language”, it does appear to point to a two-fold distribution of official services, such as we have now in Elders and Deacons.

The New Testament confirms that there should be only these two classes of office. In the making of this arrangement, the Lord has manifested His great wisdom and understanding, for He has adequately provided for the needs He knew each church would have. The needs would be “spiritual” and “material” and so there are two kinds of service (1 Pet. 4:11 — the verb translated “minister” means “serve” and from it we derive our word “deacon”). As Isaac Watts once wrote, “The church of Christ on earth is composed of spirits dwelling in flesh, and as the bishops or overseers (i.e. elders) chiefly exercise care towards the soul or spiritual part, so the chief care of the deacons seems

to relate to the body, and things belonging to it.” Now why do we believe that these are the only church officers to be appointed? Firstly, because under the apostolic organization of the early Christian churches, these two officers only were ordained (Acts 6: 1—6; 14:23); secondly, because when, in the epistles, directions are given respecting the qualifications and duties of church-officers, the officers specified are just two in number (I Tim. 3); and thirdly, because on the one occasion when Paul, in an inscription, mentions the members and officers of a church, he makes it clear that there were but these two orders of officers (Phil.1:1).

There is evidence to show that in the earliest times this scriptural pattern was carefully followed:

“Preaching through Countries and Cities, they (the apostles), appointed the firstfruits (of their labours), having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe.” (Clement of Rome, writing to the Corinthians in AD 95).

“It is needful to abstain from all these things (i.e. the sins mentioned), being subject to the presbyters (or elders) and deacons, as unto God and Christ.” (Polycarp, disciple of John and Minister at Smyrna, in a letter to the Philippians, dated AD 117).

“Appoint for yourselves, therefore, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek, and not lovers of money, and true and approved.” (“The Didache”, a Handbook of Instruction, possibly written about AD 125).

## **Elders or Rulers**

These officers described as “elders” or “bishops”. Both words appear in the New Testament, but it is certain that they denote holders of the same office. See: Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7; 1 Pet. 5:1,2 - “overseers” is the word elsewhere rendered “bishops”).



It should be recognised - and as a fundamental principle - that the essential character of the Elders' office lies in *government*. The term "elder" conveys that idea. It denotes a "*ruler*".

Confirmation of this will be found in the following considerations:

a. "Elder" was a title borrowed from the Jews, among whom it described those with authority to govern. In earliest times the elders seem to have been the heads of the principal families, responsible for the ordering of affairs within the family circle (Exod. 3:16,18; 4: 29). Under Moses, elders had committed to their care the supervision of the whole nation, and the law made provision for recognized elders to act as judges in every city (Deut. 25:5-10; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:2,9). With the institution of the synagogue, a further stage of development was reached: the elders in the locality became the elders of the synagogue. Each synagogue had a bench of them to manage its affairs and conduct its discipline. These were the "rulers" (Lk. 5:22; Acts 13:15). Therefore, although the title was variously used among the Jews, the title was always expressive of authority and government. As Dr. James Thornwell says: "the word elder denotes a ruler and nothing more."

b. The term "bishop" had been common among the Greeks. "In Athenian language", remarks Dr. J.B. Lightfoot, "it was used to designate commissioners appointed to regulate a new colony or acquisition." It occurs quite often in the Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint (280—150 BC); and, as this had a wide circulation among Greek-speaking Jews before Christ came, it is likely that the term was chosen for church officers on account of its usage there. In that version it is used to describe "officers" (referred to as "captains"), "overseers" and "rulers" (Num. 31:14; 2 Kings 11:19; 2 Chron. 34:12). All are words denoting power of governments.

c. Other titles and descriptions of these office-bearers add support to the point we are now making. They are said to preside over Christian assemblies in harmony with Christ's purpose: "them which....are over you in the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:12); and it is acknowledged that they have responsibility as spiritual rulers: "them that have the rule over you." (Heb. 13:17; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17).

The real function of eldership, then, concerns general control and superintendence; and elders who “rule” fulfil all the duties of their office. So, there is an office of authority and government in Christian churches, and those in that office are said to bear rule (Rom 12:8; Heb. 13:7, 17,24). The rulers are the elders or bishops of the church: “Let the *elders* that *rule* well be counted worthy of double honour.” (1 Tim. 5:17; cf. 3:4,5).

The distinctive and sole duty of *elders* is to *rule*. This is *not* something that belongs to the church as a whole (as in Congregationalism).

- (i) The power of government is implied in the names given to church officers: Elders (Acts 14:23; 15:6; 20:17,28), Bishops (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:7); Stewards ((Lk. 12:42; 1 Cor. 4:1; Titus 1:7), and, of course, Rulers (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:1,2 – “oversight”).
- (ii) The gifts necessary to the exercise of church authority and church power are given not to all but only to some – church officers (Matt. 16:18,19; 28:19, 20; John 21:21-23; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11,12).
- (iii) Church members are urged to respect, obey, and submit to the officers appointed as rulers (1 Thess. 5:12, 13; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7,17).
- (iv) The acts of church government are attributed to the recognised leaders of the church: whether preaching and teaching (Mk.16:15,16; Rom. 10:15; Titus 1:7-9), administering the sacraments (Matt. 28:19,20; 1 Cor. 4:1), ordaining men to service (Acts 6:2-6; 14:23; 1 Tim. 4:14), administering church discipline (1 Thess. 5:12, 13; 1 Tim. 5:19, 20; Titus 1:13; 3:10), or restoring repentant offenders (2 Cor. 2:6-8).
- (v) These officers are told to look after the church as its “overseers” (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1,2).

John Brown of Haddington rightly observes: “Great absurdity and confusion would ensue if even all adult believers should be admitted to govern the church. All would be rulers: who then would remain to be ruled?”

## **Shepherding the Flock**

How are we to understand those scriptures which speak of elders as “shepherds” appointed to “feed” the church. Does not this imply that they are really preachers? No, it does not.

In the Bible “shepherd” is a word used to describe “princes” and “rulers”: “(The Lord) saith of Cyrus (the Persian king), he is my shepherd.” (Isa. 44:28). “David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd.” (Ezek. 37:24). “When he (the Assyrian) shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men (marginal reading: princes).” (Micah 5:5). Other examples may be found in Jer. 6:5; 22:22; Ezek. 34:1-24.

What then of this word “feed”? As used in the Old Testament, it has the idea of government and supervision in general, as the following verses show: “And all Israel gathered themselves together to David unto Hebron, saying ... the Lord thy God said unto thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be ruler over my people Israel.” (1 Chron. 11:2) “The judges of Israel... I commanded to feed my people.” (1 Chron. 17:16) “Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage.” (Micah 7:14). In each case, the marginal reading is “rule” since that is the real meaning of the word. Dr. William Wilson, in his “Old Testament Word. Studies”, says that when the word is used metaphorically like this, it always means “*to lead or guide as a shepherd.*”

This prepares us, I suggest, for New Testament references which speak of elders as “shepherds” (or pastors the same word) whose duty is to “feed” the Lord’s people. The work of “shepherds”, involving management and supervision, is carefully distinguished from the work of “teachers”: “He (Christ) gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors (or shepherds) and teachers.” (Eph. 4:11). As for the shepherd’s duty, it is undoubtedly to “feed”; but, as Professor T.M. Lindsay observes, “the word translated ‘feed’ means to shepherd, and (it) implies more the idea of government and guidance than of instruction, So the meaning of the word is exactly the same as its Old Testament equivalent. Paul therefore reminds the Ephesian elders that the Holy Ghost has made them “overseers” so that they might “feed (or shepherd) the church of God.” (Acts 20:28). Peter also exhorts elders to “feed the flock” and then carefully explains what he means, telling them to use their authority of oversight but with real care to avoid domination and oppression (I Pet. 5:1-3).

We conclude that eldership is properly understood in terms of government. A man who is an elder is to be considered a “ruler”, not necessarily a public “preacher” or “teacher”. He must, of course, be “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) because his ruling work requires that he should “admonish”, “exhort” and “convince” (1 Thess. 5:12; Titus 1:9). It may also be necessary for him, in the event of the need arising, to look after the church by expounding the Scriptures publicly. However, an elder’s duties, *in and of themselves*, do *not* include regular public speaking.

## Teaching and Ruling

The Bible teaches that an elder may, in addition to his duties, be called to the public teaching ministry. There is ground then for the distinction historically made in the Reformed Churches between Teaching and Ruling Elders. “There are two offices that are permanent, ‘government’ and the ‘care of the poor’. Those who governed were, in my opinion, elders chosen out of the laymen of each congregation, who, together with the bishops (or ministers), bore rule in the correction of morals and in the exercise of discipline.” (John Calvin in his “*Institutes*”).

In case any should feel that all this is doctrinal “hair-splitting”, let it be said right now that the distinction being made is both biblical and important, and that the failure to recognise it has resulted in confusion and tragic spiritual loss for many of our churches.

Let us state the position as clearly as we can: evidence has been produced showing that while all elders are entrusted with the government and spiritual oversight of the church, an elder might *also* be called into the Ministry. Now when this happens, he is still an elder and he continues to function as one, but he is now “a Teaching Elder”. This is the biblical and reformed position. Already scriptures have been quoted in support of it, but what further evidence is there for distinguishing between Ruling and Teaching Elders?

(i) The model which the apostles followed when providing for the future regulation of the church was that of the Jewish synagogue (James 2:2 – “your assembly”, literally, “your synagogue”), and we do know that each synagogue

had an eldership (Acts 13:14,15) as well as regular preaching on the Sabbath day (Acts 15:21). What is not generally known and understood is that, while all elders were responsible for spiritual management, not all were involved in the public ministry of the Word. Dr. John Lightfoot, deservedly renowned for his knowledge of the ancient Jewish writings, says: "We may observe from whence the apostle taketh his expressions, when he speaketh of some elders ruling and labouring in word and doctrine, and some not; namely, from the same platform and constitution of the synagogue, where the 'ruler of the synagogues was more singularly for ruling the affairs of the synagogue, yet was he ever a student in divinity; and the 'minister of the congregation', labouring in the word, and reading of the law, and in doctrine, about the preaching of it: both these together are sometimes called jointly 'the rulers of the synagogue', being both elders, that ruled.'

(ii) Whenever elders are mentioned in the New Testament the word is in the plural. We read, for example, of supplies being sent from Antioch to "the *elders*" of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). Paul and Barnabas, visiting again the newly-founded churches in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ordained "*elders* in every church" (Acts 14:23). From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called for "the *elders* of the church" in that place (Acts 20:17). Titus, as an apostolic delegate in Crete, was told to ordain "*elders* in every city" (Titus 1:5). The sick are exhorted, in certain circumstances, to call for "the elders of the church" (James 5:14). In all the apostolic churches this was the pattern. Now if, as some would have us believe, there is no distinction between Ruling and Teaching Elders and all elders are scripturally commissioned to teach as well as rule, then all the early churches, no matter how small, must have had a number of brethren gifted for public teaching, *all of whom were financially supported by the church* (see: 1 Cor. 9: 14; 1 Tim 5:17,18). Is that really conceivable?

Dr. Robert Dabney has some pertinent things to say about this: "Some of the churches, as Jerusalem and Antioch, were so large that they employed many preachers at home. This we grant (Acts 13:1). But as to the vast majority of the primitive churches, we utterly deny it. Many of them were the handfuls of Christians collected by the first labours of the apostles, and meeting in private houses. History tells us that the little island of Crete had one hundred 'cities';

that is, 'walled towns', of which the most were nothing more than villages; yet Titus was to ordain a plurality of elders in every one of these where there were Christians.' Let us press the point home. How many churches today are able to ordain and then support a number of brethren qualified to preach? Very few indeed. If that is the apostolic plan, it seems quite impracticable. But if the majority of elders in our churches are Ruling Elders, and only some are called publicly to teach, it is a plan which certainly can be followed.

(iii) In one passage, Paul makes a list of spiritual gifts. He includes those which were miraculous and temporary, but he also mentions the ordinary gifts which would be permanent. He says: "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that, miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." (1 Cor. 12:28). "Helps" are commonly understood to be "deacons, who assist church-rulers in providing for the table of the Lord, the Ministers and the poor." (Dr. John Brown). "Governments" must surely refer to Ruling Elders, government being their principal work; while "teachers" will be such elders as are gifted and called to expound the Scriptures, best described as Teaching Elders.

(iv) In another place, the apostle specifies the different gifts exercised by office-bearers in the church (Rom. 12:6-8); and he teaches that they are basically of two kinds: spiritual and practical. These alternate through his list; and, to make things plain, we will set them down in the following way:

- "prophecy" (an extraordinary gift, now ceased)
- "he that teacheth/ "he that exhorteth" (teaching was followed by exhortation - Acts 14: 21 ,22)
- "he that ruleth" (the word to describe an elder's work - 1 Tim. 5:17)
- "ministry" ('*diaconia*' — the word for the deacons' work)
- "he that giveth" (lit. "distributeth") (the external aspect of the work - providing for the needy)
- "he that showeth mercy" (the internal aspect of the work – showing sympathy and compassion)

There is a clear distinction within the eldership here (the first list). While some elders are recognized as public teachers (“he that teacheth”/“he that exhorteth”, others are simply rulers (“he that ruleth”).

(v) As the ascended Lord, our Saviour bestowed gifts to His church: “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors (shepherds) and teachers.” (Eph. 4:11). The last two were permanent for the local church. When it says “and some pastors and teachers” the same order of office is meant (otherwise it would read “and some pastors and some teachers”), but the elders are evidently of different kinds and, what is more to the point, of the kinds we have already mentioned (“pastors” and “teachers”).

(vi) One verse, on account of its importance, has to be quoted: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” (I Tim. 5:17). This shows that there is indeed a divinely ordained difference within the eldership. I believe that Dr. David King of Glasgow has given the sense exactly when he wrote: “The general description of elders is, that they are all rulers - ministers are included in that description - and the specific peculiarity by which some are distinguished from the rest is, that, besides ruling, they labour in word and doctrine.” I will only add this: if all elders are called to “rule” and “preach”, as some maintain, how is it that Paul wants “double honour” given to those who only do half of what they are supposed to do?

(vii) Finally, Hebrews chapter 13 deserves both mention and emphasis. Those referred to in verse 7 appear to have been their Teaching Elders: “Remember them which have the rule over you, *who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow...*”. Further on, in verse 17, there is a separate and quite distinct exhortation concerning their Ruling Elders: “*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls...*” Then, at the very end of the chapter, (verse 24), the apostle sends his greetings to the whole eldership and the wording here is significant: “Salute *all them that have the rule over you...*”

## A Good Work

This is the plain teaching of God's Word. Those set apart to the holy office of eldership must never view it carnally in terms of privilege and honour. The Bible calls it "a good work" and elders must do that work for the glory of God and the blessing of immortal souls. They have their mandate. They must either "rule well" or, in answer to the special call of God, they must "rule well" and "labour in the word and doctrine." Only if they "give themselves" to the work, attending regularly and diligently to the needs of the local church entrusted to their care, can they expect to hear on the solemn day of reckoning, "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant!*" (Matt. 25:21,23).

## WORDS WORTH REMEMBERING

As a church we have been very thankful for the ministry we have received from those who have very kindly visited us on Lord's Days and preached God's Word to us. Recently we were blessed with the ministry of Pastor Christopher Buss, who is now retired and living in Melksham. In his sermon on "Fear not", in Isaiah 54, verse 4, he aptly cited the following words:

*Strong things have been created in this world.  
The mountain is strong, but iron cuts through it.  
Iron is strong, but fire melts it.  
Fire is strong, but water quenches it.  
Water is strong, but clouds evaporate it.  
Clouds are strong, but wind scatters it.  
Man is strong, but fear casts him down.  
Fear is strong, but sleep overcomes it.  
Sleep is strong, but death surpasses it.  
And, by God's mercy and grace. we survive it,  
Fear not.*



# THE AUTHORISED VERSION AND NEW TRANSLATIONS

**Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

*Part of an address given at the National Bible Rally in the Royal Albert Hall,  
London, on 24th October, 1961*

I suppose that the most popular of all the proposals at the present moment is to have a new translation of the Bible... The argument is that people are not reading the Bible any longer because they do not understand its language – particularly the archaic terms – what does your modern man... know about justification, sanctification, and all these Biblical terms? And so we are told the one thing that is necessary is to have a translation that Tom, Dick and Harry will understand, and I began to feel about six months ago that we had almost reached the stage in which the Authorised Version was being dismissed, to be thrown into the limbo of things forgotten, no longer of any value. Need I apologise for saying a word in favour of the Authorised Version in this gathering? Well, whatever you may think, I am going to do it without any apology.

Let us, first of all, be clear about the basic proposition laid down by the Protestant Reformers, that we must have a Bible which is, as they put it, 'understanded of the people'. That is common sense; that is obvious. We all agree too that we must never be obscurantist. We must never approach the Bible in a mere antiquarian spirit. Nobody wants to be like that, or to defend such attitudes. But there is a very grave danger incipient in much of the argument that is being presented today for these new translations. There is a danger, I say, of our surrendering something that is vital and essential.

Look at it like this. Take this argument that the modern man does not understand such terms as 'justification', 'sanctification', and so on. I want to ask a question:.. When did the ordinary man ever understand those terms? ... Consider the colliers to whom John Wesley and George Whitfield used to preach in the 18th century. Did they understand them? They had not even been to a day school, an elementary school. They could not read, they could

not write. Yet these were the terms which they heard, and the Authorised Version was the version used. The common people have never understood these terms. However, I want to add something to this. We must be very careful in using such an argument against the Authorised Version, for the reason that the very nature and character of the truth which the Bible presents to us is such that it is extremely difficult to put into words at all. We are not describing an animal or a machine; we are concerned here with something which is spiritual, something which does not belong to this world at all, and which, as the apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians reminds us, 'the princes of this world' do not know. Human wisdom is of no value here; it is a spiritual truth; it is something that is altogether different. This is truth about God primarily, and because of that it is a mystery. There is a glory attached to it, there is a wonder, and something which is amazing. The apostle Paul, who probably understood it better than most, looking at its contents, stands back and says, 'Great is the mystery of godliness' (1 Tim 3:16).

Yet we are told, it must be put in such simple terms and language that anybody taking it up and reading it is going to understand all about it. My friends, this is nothing but sheer nonsense! What we must do is to educate the masses of the people up to the Bible, not bring the Bible down to their level. One of the greatest troubles in life today is that everything is being brought down to the same level, everything is cheapened. The common man is made the standard of authority; he decides everything, and everything has to be brought down to him. You are getting it on your wireless, your television, in your newspapers; everywhere standards are coming down and down. Are we to do that with the Word of God? I say, No! What has happened in the past has been this: an ignorant, an illiterate people in this country and in foreign countries, coming into salvation, have been educated up to the Book and have begun to understand it, to glory in it, and to praise God for it. I am here to say that we need to do the same at this present time. What we need is therefore, not to replace the Authorised Version with what, I am tempted at times to call, the ITV edition of the Bible. We need rather to reach and train people up to the standard and the language, the dignity and the glory of the old Authorised Version....

Very well, my friends, let me say a word for the old book, the old Authorised Version. It was translated by fifty-four men, every one of them a great scholar, and published in 1611.

Here is another thing to commend it to you: this Authorised Version came out at a time when the church had not yet divided into Anglican and Nonconformist. I think there is an advantage even in that. They were all still as one, with very few exceptions, when the Authorised version was produced.

Another important point to remember is this. The Authorised Version was produced some time after that great climactic event which we call the Protestant Reformation. There had been time by then to see some of the terrible horrors of Rome, and all she stood for. The early Reformers had too much on their plate, as it were; Luther may have left many gaps; but when this translation was produced, there had been time for men to be able to see Rome for what she really was. These translators were all men who were orthodox in the faith. They believed that the Bible is the infallible Word of God and they submitted to it as the final authority, as against the spurious claims of Rome, as against the appeals to the Church Fathers, and everything else.

Here, I say, were fifty-four men, scholars and saintly, who were utterly submitted to the Book. You have never had that in any other version. Here, and here alone, you have a body of men who were absolutely committed to it, who gave themselves to it, who did not want to correct or sit in judgment on it, whose only concern and desire was to translate and interpret it for the masses of the people.

In view of all this, my argument is that the answer does not lie in producing new translations; they are coming out almost every week, but are they truly aiding the situation? No, and for this reason: men no longer read the Bible not because they cannot understand its language, but because they do not believe in it. They do not believe in God; they do not want it. Their problem is not one of language and of terminology; it is the state of the heart. Therefore what do we do about it? It seems to me there is only one thing to do, the thing that has always been done in the past: we must preach it and our preaching must be wholly based upon its authority.

# EPILOGUE

## Are you fit?

*“.....exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” (1 Timothy 4, verses 7b and 8)*

Here is a challenge to be correctly fit! There is much emphasis in today's world of physical fitness. It is true, as Paul wrote to Timothy, that bodily exercise does have its place though compared with Spiritual fitness and in the light of eternity it is of a lesser order. But we do need to be as fit as we are able else we shall become unwell and unable to be active for the Lord.

Paul however emphasises the need for spiritual fitness (“exercise thyself rather unto godliness”). We need to pay primary attention to spiritual fitness and this “godliness” is a right and Biblical way to live the Christian life.

Physical fitness requires regular effort and attention to the development and maintenance of a fit and healthy body. So also with spiritual fitness. It needs to be developed and maintained in accordance with Scripture. It takes understanding, effort, discipline and determination.

Just as our bodies can become unhealthy by lethargy, inappropriate nourishment, and excesses, so also the spiritual lives of believers can become slack, distracted, aimless and lacking strength of purpose.

So! Let's go to it and become exercised unto godliness by prayer, Bible Study and attention to the needs of others. It all takes effort and regularity.

We may not aspire to win gold at the Olympics but with the Apostle Paul we can say: “I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”. (Phil. 3:14).

*Ron Morris*