

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ I Peter 5:8

**Vol.XXXII-No.6
November-December 2004
Leadership In The Church**

BIBLICAL NEED FOR TRUE LEADERS

Ben Wright

God’s people have always needed leaders. When Moses was drawing near to the time of his death, he asked God to provide a shepherd for the Israelites (Numbers 27:15-23). The reason for his asking for a leader was that he was afraid that the children of Israel would become as “sheep which have no shepherd.” Joshua proved to be a great leader of the people, except that it seems he lacked foresight. Joshua did not ask God to name his replacement and as a result, each Israelite “did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

When God provided judges to save the people from oppression, the people would follow God for a while and then return to their sinful ways. After a king was given the people it seemed that everything went well. The only problem was not all the kings followed God. Eventually, this led to captivity for God’s people. The Old Testament reveals to us plainly that God’s people need not only leadership, but true leaders. By true, what is meant is one who follows God and leads others to God.

Matthew Henry went to London and met a young lady of the nobility. She was also wealthy and they fell in

love. She went to ask her father if she could marry him and he said, “He’s got no background, you don’t know where he’s come from.” She replied, “Yes, I know, but I know where he’s going and I want to go with him.” This is the type of leader that God’s people need. One who knows he is headed to heaven and inspires others to follow him there.

Jesus is the head of the church, therefore He is its leader (Ephesians 1:22-23). Jesus delegated His authority to the apostles (John 13:20; 2 Corinthians 5:20). This is why it is said that the early church followed the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42). Paul told the Corinthians to be imitators of him as he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

It would be wonderful if we had modern day apostles that could reveal to us the exact answers to the questions we have, but we do not have direct guidance today. Knowing that this would be the case, God devised the office of an elder to provide leadership. Knowing that it would be dangerous to leave the leadership of a congregation in the hands of one man, God devised the eldership: a group of men leading the congregation and

making decisions in matters of judgment and upholding the standard of truth as taught in God’s word (cf. I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11).

Paul commanded the Ephesian elders to watch after the flock of God and to feed the church of God (Acts 20:28). Paul reminded Titus that part of the work that he was to be doing in Crete was ordaining elders in every city there (Titus 1:5-11). One reason for elders would be to stop “those... who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not” (Titus 1:11). That was the work of a leader then and it is now as well.

An eldership is to lead each congregation by setting the example of godly living, standing for the truth and against error, and providing spiritual food for the congregation. They also have the added responsibility of watching for the souls of the members of the congregation they shepherd (Hebrews 13:17). Happy is the congregation with a sound, solid, loving eldership.

Continued on page 48

EDITORIAL

Leadership in the Church

Where would any organization be without leadership? The fact is without leadership any organization is doomed. Robert R Taylor wrote in his book, *The Elder and His Work*, "In order to function successfully it is imperative that every institution have some form of government. The purpose of this government is to oversee its actions and execute its chosen policies...The church about which we read in the Bible is no exception to this general rule of every institution's needing some form of governmental organization" (5). Franklin Camp, emphasizing leadership, penned in his book, *Principles and Perils of Leadership*, "Every worthwhile endeavor requires leadership" (84).

Those leaders in the Church are described in I Timothy 3:1-7. In this context we can see the qualifications of those who are to lead the body of Christ. Leadership is often determined by popularity, but such is not the case when it comes to the church. These qualifications are not suggestions. They are requirements. Those unqualified would not and should not be allowed to serve in such a capacity.

We can understand more about these leaders when we look at terms, which describe them and give us a better understanding of their function. "Presbuteroi" is the Greek term that is most often used to describe these men. We get our word "elder" which has reference to "age" and to those "in the Christian church ...being raised up and qualified by the work of the Holy Spirit, were appointed to have spiritual care of, and to exercise oversight over, the churches" (Vines, Vol. 2, p. 21). There is no doubt that this term has reference to age of an

individual, but it has so much more meaning than just age. This term "elder" carries the idea of decision-making or direction. Paul said to Timothy, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17). It is the responsibility of the elders of each congregation to rule, lead in such a fashion that would be most challenging to every individual. We need leaders in the church that will be willing to direct God's people in the way that He has appointed (Jeremiah 6:16; John. 14:6). There is a danger of leaders who would seek their own purpose and their own direction and not that which God has prescribed. Diotrephes was one such leader (3 John 9,10). As long as these men govern the body of Christ as they should we have a responsibility to support and obey them. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

"Episcopoi" is the next Greek term, which describes these leaders of the church. Earl Edwards in his material on *Leadership in the Church* says, "This term (episcopoi) is especially significant, much more so than elder (presbuteros). A bishop (episcopos) is a guardian of others, one who oversees the work of others and who superintends that in which others are engaged (55). Most often "episcopoi" is translated bishop. The term "'bishop' or 'overseer,' indicates the character of the work undertaken" (Vines Vol. 1, p.129). Wise bishops will learn to delegate works to others so that the maximum amount of work can be accomplished. This principle can be seen in Acts 6:2 where the twelve said, "...It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and

serve tables". They were not trying to say that it was beneath them to do common labor, but that it was more needful to continue in the teaching of God's word. The bishops of each congregation are to guard our souls. Nothing is more important than that! Christ asked the question, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul..." (Matthew 16:26). God give us men who will watch for our souls!

The last Greek term at which we will look is "Poimen". Vines defines it as "a shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks (not merely one who feeds them), is used metaphorically of Christian 'pastors,' Ephesians 4:11. Pastors guide as well as feed the flock; cp. Acts 20:28, which, with verse 17, indicates that this was the service committed to elders (overseers or bishops); so also in 1 Peter 5:1,2, 'tend the flock...exercising the oversight,' R.V.; this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence" (Vol. 3, p. 167). From "poimen", comes our term pastor and shepherd. This gives a different picture of the responsibility of our leaders. It may be fine in the business world for their leaders to be aloof from their employees, but such is not the case in the church. It is interesting that Christ said, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine" (John 10:14). Shepherds know their sheep. They are aware of their needs and can recognize problems that exist because of familiarity. How sad it is for elders to "lord over" their flock as if they are royalty and the members, peasants. How can this kind of eldership give account for these souls? Peter warned of this, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3).

God give us the right kind of leaders!

QUALIFICATIONS

Sam Willcut

The concept of leadership entails the influence of people conjoined with the aspects of authority and responsibility. Leaders exist in every facet of life—political, educational, spiritual and such like. However, we will deal in this article with the publication theme of leadership in the church. Nevertheless, while elders are definitely leaders in that the Holy Spirit has made them “overseers” (Acts 20:28), others are also involved in leadership roles in other areas of the church. The men that the church selected in Acts 6 were in a position of responsibility, albeit they were servants. In addition, teachers are in positions of leadership (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16; James 3:1). These are but a few examples of leadership in the church. Therefore, the qualifications that we will note in this article are not only the divinely prescribed qualifications listed for elders and deacons in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but are even broader to include others with leadership roles in the church.

A leader in the church must be blameless in character. After establishing the desire of a bishop for the respective office, the next qualification is that he should be blameless (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6-7). This characteristic, in reality, summarizes all of the characteristics of a leader. He is one who is unrepentable. He is not sinlessly perfect (Romans 3:23; I John 1:8-10), but he is walking in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord in such a way that one could not point any fingers at him, even after a public investigation. Even preachers are to be “unrebukeable” (cf. I Timothy 6:14).

A leader is blameless in his family life. For example, an elder is “the husband of one wife” (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), or essentially, a one-woman man. He rules “well his own

house, having his children in subjection” (I Timothy 3:4-5). Thus, his children are faithful to his leadership (Titus 1:6). They do not bring reproach upon his character by being worldly or “unruly.” Since the position of elder is one of authority, Paul explains that one must see it in the home before he can exercise it in the church (I Timothy 3:5). In addition, deacons have similar characteristics (I Timothy 3:11-12), with Paul even giving attention to their wives.

A leader is blameless in his personal life. In other words, he is one who exhibits certain traits that are necessary for the role. For example, an elder is to be “vigilant,” “sober” and “temperate” (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8), or one who is calm, thinks and reasons clearly with a sound and self-controlled mind. He demonstrates such by being “not given to wine” (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). He is “not greedy of filthy lucre” and “not covetous” (I Timothy 3:3), but emphasizes the spiritual above the physical in his life by his honesty and moderation. He is “patient” (I Timothy 3:3) and “temperate” (Titus 1:8), being a strong man in an orderly manner. He is “not self-willed” (Titus 1:7), being arrogant or dominating the will of others, and he is literally “a lover of good men” (Titus 1:8), or loves all that are good. Thus, he demonstrates by personal integrity one that is blameless in his personal life. Deacons share in many of these same characteristics (I Timothy 3:8-13).

A leader is blameless in his social life. An elder maintains “good behavior” (I Timothy 3:2), acting in a modest way. He displays himself publicly in a calm fashion, “not a striker,” “not a brawler” and “not soon angry” (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7); he never displays a temper, neither is he contentious or quarrelsome. Rather,

he has “a good report” in the community, having non-Christians respect him as much as Christians. He shows such by being one “given to hospitality” (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). In all, he is “just” (Titus 1:8), treating everyone fairly. In addition, deacons are “not double tongued” (I Timothy 3:8).

A leader is blameless in his Christian life. He is “apt to teach” (I Timothy 3:2), “holding fast the faithful word” (Titus 1:9), since he will need to utilize such talents in exhorting and convincing the gainsayers, unruly and vain talkers and deceivers (Titus 1:9-11). He is “holy” (Titus 1:8) and “not a novice” (I Timothy 3:6), both in a physical as well as spiritual sense. Describing deacons, Paul says, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (I Timothy 3:13).

Finally, and most importantly, leaders are to understand their role of servitude. Commenting on the subject of leadership, Jesus said, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:11-12). In like manner, Peter exhorted elders not to act as “lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (I Peter 5:3). Therefore, humility is an essential ingredient in the qualifications of leadership, for pride has broken many a leader because of his position (cf. I Timothy 3:6). Deacons are servants. Preachers are servants. Teachers are servants. Even elders are servants—feeding and tending the flock. All of God’s leaders in the church should display an attitude of servitude. “Make me a servant!”

PO Box 127
Munford, TN 38058

Leadership In The Church The Need To Submit

Dale Hubbert

Profitable leadership in the church of our Lord is dependent upon godly leaders and submissive followers. The Thorndike-Barnhart Comprehensive Desk Dictionary defines submit – “1. yield to the power, control, or authority of another or others; surrender; yield. 2. Refer to the consideration or judgment of another or others.” The word “submission” is defined in part as obedience and humbleness.

In all worthy undertakings that involve joint effort it is necessary that someone be in charge. Successful leadership is vital to accomplishing the goal of any group. Leaders are invaluable in the home, on the job, on the ball field, and on the battlefield. The church is certainly not an exception. Leaders can only be effective if there are those who are respectful, cooperative, and obedient to the authority that has been designated.

Who are the leaders in the local congregation and where did they get their authority? Acts 20:28 points out the role of elders as overseers over the “flock” of God. Just as clearly is evidenced the design of the Holy Spirit in such an arrangement. Titus was instructed by Paul to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). To ignore such instruction or provide an alternative solution is contrary to God’s pattern for His church.

In what areas do elders have authority? It must be in matters of judgment and expediency as matters of faith and doctrine have already been declared through the written gospel. Peter properly exclaimed that we ought to obey God rather than men. Should a conflict arise, the Bible should be the final Authority! (Acts 5:29).

The elders in each congregation have authority over the preacher, deacons, members, and each other. I

recently became aware of a preacher who did not believe he was subject to the eldership. He reasoned that because he had taken a leading role in appointing elders for a congregation that had previously been without them, he was not under their authority and furthermore he could remove them from their office. His unscriptural position was magnified when there was a personal conflict with one of the elders. Preachers ARE under the eldership and should be submissive to them.

It is evident that God requires submission. Peter declares: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man For the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Peter 2:13-14). Paul proclaims: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” (Romans 13:1-2). If there is a need to be submissive to civil government that often operates without regard to God’s eternal truths, how much more important is it to submit totally to those who have been carefully and prayerfully selected to watch for our souls in the greatest kingdom this world has ever known?

Submission to God (James 4:7) demands submission to our elders. “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17). Elders who meet the biblical qualifications are men who will be genuinely interested in the welfare of

the church and each member. They will prayerfully seek what is best for each member and the group as a whole. Being human they will be subject to errors of judgment, both individually and collectively. Being humble and striving to grow they will learn from past decisions and make better choices as the future unfolds.

We are obligated, and more importantly, should by love, be motivated to be cooperative, cordial, and responsive to their decisions in matters of expediency and judgment. While we will not always be in perfect agreement in matters of judgment, it should be our goal to support and defend the choices and decisions of those who have volunteered to shepherd our souls.

We should be extremely careful about criticizing the elders. The unity of the church is often damaged by unjust criticism of the elders. “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses” (1 Tim 5:19). It is possible that elders individually or as a group do not fulfill the office as God intended. We should cautiously examine the situation in the light of scripture before making such a declaration and seeking further action.

The elders should have a great sense of confidence regarding the support we have pledged to them. They should know that we will always stand behind them and beside them as long as they uphold the banner of truth. They will benefit from the solace of knowing we are gladly determined to submit under God and unto those He has appointed to watch over His family.

3206 Hudson St.
Jasper, AL 35505

The Leadership of Moses

Chuck Webster

Most of us—if we had been in Moses' situation and asked to do what Moses was asked—probably would have responded similarly. In essence, God asked him to travel to one of the world's most powerful nations, one not accustomed to submitting to others' wishes, and lead the Israelites out of slavery. Moses was told to walk into the palace of a proud, powerful Pharaoh and demand him to release one of his nation's most essential economic commodities (its slave labor). Complicating the matter was Moses' familiarity with the stubborn spirit of his fellow countrymen. It is hardly surprising, then, that the eighty-year-old shepherd responded incredulously: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11).

We see qualities in Moses that we desperately need today. As in every age, the church faces problems from within and without. These challenges are daunting but not insurmountable, especially when we are guided by leaders blessed with Moses-like characteristics. What traits do today's leaders need? Studying one of the Bible's greatest heroes will help.

A leader has a patient spirit. Moses recognized the stubbornness of his followers: "Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you" (Deuteronomy 9:24). If anything, Moses understated the matter, especially in view of the fact that they had constantly tested his patience: they murmured for water at Marah (Exodus 15:24), bemoaned their departure from Egypt (Exodus 16:3), murmured for water at Horeb (Exodus 17:2-3), built the golden calf (Exodus 32), complained (Numbers 11:1), murmured for the meat of Egypt (Numbers 11:4-6), believed the faithless spies' report (Numbers 14), rebelled against Moses' leadership

(Numbers 16), chided Moses because of a lack of water (Numbers 20), complained about food (Numbers 21:4-5), and committed adultery with Moabite women (Numbers 25). It is hard to imagine a more difficult people. Though often frustrated, Moses never abandoned his leadership post. Through years of difficulty he was willing to stay the course, to keep trudging along, to lead the people firmly forward.

A leader has a loving heart. Moses was nothing if not passionate. He defended his brethren and killed the Egyptian (Exodus 2:1ff). He intervened for the Israelites on two occasions: after they built the golden calf (Exodus 32:11ff) and after they accepted the ten spies' report and God threatened to destroy them (Numbers 14:13ff). Though often frustrated with the people's lack of faith, Moses passionately loved the Israelites. Nothing but love could have kept him with them through the difficult forty-year period.

Paul clearly points to the need for an elder to be a "lover of hospitality, a lover of good men" (Titus 1:8). The only thing that sustains elders through the persistent trials of shepherding the flock of God is that they fervently love all of God's children. If they do not, they cannot lead effectively. Paul loved his Jewish brethren, going so far as to state that he could wish himself "accursed from Christ" for his "brethren, [his] kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:1-3; cf. 10:1). We should harbor a similar passion for our spiritual family (cf. Romans 12:10; 1 Peter. 3:8; 2 Peter 1:7).

A leader spends time with God. Anyone who leads people closer to God must be close to God himself. When God gave Moses the law, Moses twice spent forty days with God (Exodus 24:18; 34:28), and the latter time Moses' physical

appearance changed—the "skin of his face shone" (Exodus 34:29-35). He was one with whom God spoke "face to face" (Exodus 33:11). He consulted God in the morning and evening (Numbers 10:33-36).

Today's leaders (elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, etc.) must be close to God. Their faces should glow with a spirit of love and compassion. They consult God morning and evening. They meditate on His Word day and night (Psalm 1:1-3). Elders hold "fast the faithful word" (Titus 1:9). Preachers "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:13). Let none of us pretend to be spiritual leaders if we are neglecting our devotional time.

A leader presents a godly example. Exodus 17:5 contains a telling phrase: "And the LORD said unto Moses, *Go on before the people, . . .*" (emp. added). Moses later recounts this command: "And the LORD said unto me, Arise, take thy journey before the people, . . ." (Deuteronomy 10:11).

Go on before the people . . . Grasp the implications of that statement. Moses was to be in front of the people leading them, not behind them pushing them. The application to leadership in every age is crucial. Elders are not to be "lords over God's heritage, but . . . ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3; cf. Acts 20:28). Preachers are to set the right example, taking heed to themselves (1 Timothy 4:12,16). Congregations do not respond to elders who dictate, but do not demonstrate, nor do they listen to preachers who preach but not do practice. God has given authority to elderships, but their greatest effectiveness is in their roles as examples and shepherds who go before their flocks.

3248 Lorna Rd
Hoover, Alabama

Perils of Bad Leadership

Ashley Kizer

No one ever led as capably as Jesus. He was the perfect “example” (1 Peter 2:21), the perfect “teacher” (John 3:2), and the very “Word” of God (John 1:1). Nevertheless, those who will follow must choose for themselves whom they will serve (cf. Joshua 24:15). Good leadership does not guarantee one hundred percent devotion. If that were so it would take away our ability to serve God voluntarily. Sadly, despite good leadership, many will choose the broad way that “leadeth to destruction” (Matthew 7:13). Even Jesus was deserted by His closest disciples in difficult times (cf. Matthew 26:31, 56). Being a leader is not an easy task, but it must be done.

It has been my humble observation, after a brief study of the scriptures in regard to this topic, that the quality of a leader can be determined in part by those to whom he listens. Solomon once wrote, “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels...” (Proverbs 1:5). When Moses received the command to lead God’s people out of captivity, he was afraid that the Jews and Pharaoh would not listen to him (Exodus 4:1; 6:30). However, he should have had more concern about to whom he was listening. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus’ name would be called, among other things, “Counsellor” (Isaiah 9:6). This was confirmed on the Mount of Transfiguration when God the Father said of Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matthew 17:5). So the ancient scripture has proven itself to be true: “This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working” (Isaiah 28:29). Let us notice some leaders from biblical history that fell into great danger because they listened to foolish counsel.

Perhaps one of the most embarrassing examples of leadership faux pas is the cowardly and permissive attitude Aaron showed at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 32. Moses had climbed the mountain to receive the two tablets of the testimony from God, and Aaron was left in command of the fickle Israelites. Growing impatient, and assuming that Moses was not coming back, they demanded a false god to be made for themselves (cf. v. 1). Instead of having faith in God and the courage to be a true leader, Aaron caved under the pressure of the multitude and became their meaningless puppet. He effectively led them in fashioning a golden calf out of their jewelry, and even had the audacity to build an altar to it, calling it Lord (v. 5). This type of abominable leadership is sadly not confined to ancient times. Today, the Lord’s church is too often led by cowardly elders who simply cater to the desires of the majority, neglecting the commands concerning discipline and teaching, and their responsibilities to “feed the church of God” (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; Acts 20:28). How long can we endure popularity-seeking preachers who seek to tickle ears instead of pricking hearts (2 Timothy 4:3; Acts 2:37)? The consequences are devastating to the body of Christ. Aaron’s failure to listen to wise counsel and lead courageously made the Israelites “naked unto their shame among their enemies” (Exodus 32:25). It was a dark day in the midst of God’s people as they were punished for their unfaithfulness: “about three thousand men of the people fell that day” (v. 28). I wonder how well Aaron was able to sleep that night. Do you think he achieved the popularity he was seeking?

Consider also a leader who made the decision to listen to his young friends instead of accepting wise

counsel from his elders. Rehoboam was King Solomon’s son who succeeded him as king of Israel (1 Kings 11:43). His so-called friends had convinced him to begin his reign with the threat of a harsher rule than his father had given them (12:10). Consequently, the people rebelled and the kingdom was divided (vv. 16-17). How many congregations of the Lord’s people have been divided because poor leaders had removed the “ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set” (Proverbs 22:28)? Job once said, “With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding” (Job 12:12). Leaders must always choose wisdom over friendship unless they are one in the same.

Perhaps the most foolish of all leaders are those who only listen to themselves. King Saul thought it best to disobey God’s command to utterly destroy the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15). If only he would have sought counsel from a godly man like the prophet Samuel, who was eventually the one who had to set him straight: “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king” (v. 23). The consequence for Saul’s actions was surely no stricter than the punishment will be for those of us who fail to lead properly. Diotrephes is another example of a leader who went astray because of his own selfish desires. According to John, he “love[d] to be first among them...” (3 John 1:9).

All men are fallible, and that includes leaders. Jeremiah said, “I know, O Lord, that a man’s way is not in himself...” (Jeremiah 10:23). And if we need God’s help to direct ourselves; certainly we must use His counsel to direct others. His guidance alone can keep us free from the perils of bad leadership.

4207 Veterans Memorial Dr.
Adamsville, AL 35005

THREE PARADISES

Hugo McCord

The word “paradise” is derived from the “Old Persian pairidaeza, enclosure” (Webster). Among “the Persians” a paradise was:

A grand enclosure, or preserve, hunting-ground, park, shady and well-watered, in which wild animals were kept for the hunt, it was enclosed by walls and furnished with towers for the hunters (Thayer, 480).

In the Hebrew the word was pardes “garden, park” (Davidson 632). In the Greek the word was paradeisos, simply meaning “paradise” (B-G-D, 614). The Bible tells of three Paradises.

The Garden of Eden

Moses wrote that God planted a gan, a garden, in a place called “Eden,” and he gave clear information that Eden was in ancient Mesopotamia, present day Iraq (Genesis 2:10-14). Two of the four rivers irrigating Eden are still known to geographers: The Tigris and the Euphrates. Civilization thus had its start in the Mesopotamian valley.

The name “Eden” (‘Eden, from ‘den meaning to live luxuriously) means “pleasantness,” and since everything the Lord had made was “very good” (Genesis 1:31, the Garden of Eden must have been delightful: no thorns, brambles, thistles, diseases, decay, and death. Out “of the ground Yahweh god caused to grow every tree pleasant to see and good for food” (Genesis 2:9). So it is no wonder that the translators (LXX, they are called) of the Greek Old Testament called the garden “paradise” (Genesis 2:8).

Two of the trees not only produced edible food but also had miraculous power. One of them was

“the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” and the other was “the tree of life” (Genesis 2:9). Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Adam and Eve were not to eat (Genesis 2:17). Their sin caused them to be ejected from the garden, which also cut them off from the tree of life, of which they could have eaten and have lived “forever” (Genesis 3:22). The Garden of Eden has long since disappeared, and so the story of the first Paradise ends in sadness.

The Place of Comfort

Thus the first paradise was a physical garden, where Adam and Eve lived temporarily. The second Paradise is a non-physical “place of blessedness above the earth” (B-G-D, 614), but it is not the “heaven of heavens” (I Kings 8:27) where God is (Psalm 139:8, Acts 7:49).

After the “spirit” of Jesus (Luke 23:46) left his body on the cross and went to “Paradise” (Luke 23:43) for “three days and nights” (Matthew 12:40), he had “not yet ascended to the Father” (John 20:17). Since it is certain in Paradise he was not suffering, it is reasonable to say that he was in a place of comfort (cf. Luke 16:25). Unless there are two places of comfort for the souls of righteous people, then “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22) is another name for Paradise where Jesus was. Furthermore, a third name for Paradise is “the third heaven,” where it appears that Paul went miraculously in 43 A.D., and returned to the earth, having “heard unutterable words, not lawful for a human to speak” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

A practical deduction from the information listed above, showing that Abraham’s bosom is another name for spiritual Paradise, is that the righteous

souls now in Paradise know what is going on back on this earth just as the sinful rich man’s soul, in the burning flames of Hades, knows about his five brothers back on the earth (Luke 16:27-28). This means that Lois McCord, dying July 13, 2000, in her 89th year, now is out of her physical suffering, and is rejoicing at meeting “righteous Abel” (Matthew 23:35), and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew 8:11), and hundreds of Christians she had known on the earth. This also means that Lois now knows what is going on back on the earth, and she is joyful if they are remaining faithful to the Lord.

The Heaven of Heavens

Not only does the Bible speak of Paradise being a physical garden on the earth in Adams’s day, and of Paradise being an intermediate waiting place of comfort for the souls of the righteous before Jesus’ second coming at the end of the world (2 Peter 3:10-12), but also of Paradise being the “heaven of heavens” where God is (1 Kings 8:26; Psalm 139): “to the one who overcomes,” says Jesus, “I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7).

Thus heaven is pictured as a restored Garden of Eden. The “tree of life,” on “both sides of the water of life (clear as crystal),” is in the restored garden “bearing twelve fruits monthly” (Revelation 22:102). The curse placed on the original garden of Eden (Genesis 3:17-19) will be gone forever, for in “the Paradise of God” there “shall be no curse no more” (Genesis 3:176-19; Revelation 2:7; 22:3).

Hugo McCord
1914-2004

Non Profit US
Postage Paid
Permit #
80316
Anniston, AL

Sadly, there are congregations that have poor leadership from their elders. These congregations always seem to be having troubles. Poor leadership is a hindrance to growth, initiative and outreach. Where poor leadership is, church squabbles and even splits are sure to follow.

The church is the bride of Christ and the Lord desires true leaders to take care of His bride. Being an elder

is a tremendous responsibility but also a tremendous honor. In an age where the church is under constant attack from both without and within, the need for true leaders is greater than ever.

In the church today, there are still those that subvert whole houses. There are still those that would bind that which is not bound by God. There are still those that would loose that

which God has not loosed. There are still those that would introduce unbiblical ideas into the church and have them accepted. Without true leaders these people would take over the church and have her commit spiritual adultery.

26036 Hwy 78
Carbon Hill, AL 35549

VIGIL is published under the oversight of the elders of the Adamsville Church of Christ
Ronnie Hayes Editor, and Ashley Kizer, Associate Editor.

Editor’s note: This is the last issue of 2004. I want to say “Thank You” to all who have had a part in the making of “*Vigil*.” To all of the staff writers, Thank You. To all who help in putting the *Vigil* together, Thank You. A special Thank You goes to Ashley Kizer, my associate editor. Ashley does so much, I am very thankful to have the opportunity to work with him. And this paper wouldn’t exist without the faithful Elders at Adamsville, to them, Thank You very much. To all of you, who read and support *Vigil*, Thank You. May God bless each of you in those things for good. May the *Vigil* have the best year it has ever had in 2005.

WORKS BY FRANKLIN CAMP

Redemption Through the Bible, Preacher’s Class, Sermons, We now have available two books: *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption, and A study of the Book of Colossians.*

Redemption Through the Bible is a series of Bible studies through the entire Bible that was studied primarily at the Adamsville congregation. The entire set is now available and contained on a total of 44 CD’s in MP3 format. We now have available his Preacher’s Class and Sermons. The Preacher’s Class has a total of (12) and his sermons are contained on (2) CD’s also in the MP3 format. Each CD’s cost is \$5.00 plus tax and shipping. A study of the Book of Colossians is \$3.95, and the Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption is \$12.95 plus tax and shipping. You may order these Books or CD’s by calling (205) 674-5659 or e-mailing Adamsville Church of Christ at acofc@bellsouth.net. (Please include your address and phone number.)