



# The Reflector

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## Esteeming Elders

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**A**nd we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. (1 Thess. 5:12-13 NKJV)

These verses places a great responsibility upon members of a local congregation in regard to their elders or overseers. We believe that most Bible students believe that those that “are over you in the Lord” are the overseers of the church (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17).

Perhaps there is no greater need today among churches than to qualify and appoint elders to oversee them and their work. No church can reach its full potential until it reaches the point of having qualified men appointed as overseers (Tit. 1:5). As Shepherds of the flock of God they have an awesome responsibility of watching for the souls of the flock, knowing that they will give an account to the Lord for having or not having done so (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:4). They are not board members overseeing a business, they are Shepherds tending a flock of God's sheep with the responsibility of feeding and protecting them spiritually. They are not just to rule, but to “rule well.”

Having served as an elder in the past, I know first hand some of the hard decisions that have to be made and the unjust criticism that often comes with the territory. I also know the joy of overseeing a flock who, for the most part, are humbly serving the Lord. My hat's off to those elders who understand their God-given role of watching for souls and use their position accordingly. They

should receive the respect and cooperation from every member of the congregation. Members are obligated to do their best to see that they are able to do their work with joy and not grief. (Heb. 13:17).

However, elders are not gods nor lords. They are men. They make mistakes, some trivial, but others serious. They should not be automatically followed unconditionally. Sometimes, they should even be rightly rebuked for their sins (1 Tim. 5:19-20).

Local churches have been led into error by people **blindly** following an eldership because people have the idea that to “obey them that have the rule over you” means that they must follow the elders – unconditionally, no matter what. With many congregations there is the unwritten rule that the elders' decisions are always to be followed and respected – no questions asked. This conveniently takes the burden of studying and thinking for oneself and gives a convenient “out” if questioned about any thing that might be going on within the congregation – “it was the elders' decision and I respect the elders.”

Also, often individuals and churches make it their practice to honor without question or investigation any action that the elders of another congregation may take against a member. Folks, wake up. Elders are fallible. Sometimes they can (wittingly or unwittingly) be harsh and unjust in some of their actions. It is, to say the least, irresponsible to automatically accept the judgment of any group of fallible men and act upon it without asking for the basis for their judgment.

Any elders, worth the salt in their bread, will welcome any questions you might have about any decisions they make and will be willing to sit down and discuss the reasons for their decisions. Only those that rule as “lords it over God’s heritage” (1 Pet. 5:1-4) will tell you that they expect you to accept without question their decisions because they are “the elders.”

It is this “no questions asked” mentality that has caused many congregations to accept the unscriptural innovations of the past. ■

## Helpful Hints for Bible Study and Understanding

James R. Cope

The Bible is the greatest book in the world. More books have been written about it than any other piece of literature on earth. It consistently leads the list of “best sellers” and has been the greatest inspiration to poets and painters, novelists and narrators in composing the greatest works of the ages. To the down-trodden and outcast of earth it offers hope, to the philosopher and sage it imparts wisdom, to the industrialist and farmer it teaches patience, to youth and young manhood it inspires courage, and to lives broken by sin and marred by transgression it points the way of salvation. Hated by the atheist, scorned by the agnostic, and betrayed by the modernist, it has nevertheless been the greatest influence in the development of civilization and its severest critics have never been able to produce any work of higher moral precepts or ethical influence. No psychiatrist has been able to penetrate the human heart to greater depth and reveal the emotions, ambitions, or weaknesses of men with more clarity nor has any sociologist been able to offer more practical and abiding remedies for the ills of a sick society than those afforded by this unique volume.

Yet even by its professed friends it is frequently abused because it is misuse? The apostle Paul tells us that we should “handle aright the word of truth.” This being true we need to study diligently that we divide it properly and make the application

of it the Holy Spirit intended when He revealed the mind of God in it. Christians accept the Old Testament as inspired of God and applicable to the people to whom it was revealed and for whom it was intended. Consisting of five books of law, Genesis through Deuteronomy, 17 books of history and poetry Joshua through Songs of Solomon and 17 books of prophecy Isaiah through Malachi, this division of the Bible abounds with examples which Christians can use in teaching the blessings of obedience and the disastrous effects of disobedience to God. Therein we prove the claims of Christ and the inspiration of the New Testament. But we cannot expect to find there what Jehovah tells men now to do to be saved, for the scriptures set forth that mankind is now subject to the gospel or law of Christ.

Thus the New Testament with the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John was written primarily to convince men that Jesus was the Son of God. The one book of Acts makes known the establishment and history of the church of Christ as it operated under apostolic direction in carrying the message of salvation to benighted non. sage of salvation to benighted men. The remaining 22 books of the New Testament consist of epistles written to individuals, congregations, and groups of Christians impressing them with the life the newly established church should live, the worship it should render, and the work it should do. Included in these epistles is the will of God toward false doctrines and the teachers of them doctrines and teachers which would then and will till this day destroy the identity of the Lord’s church.

In the light of these general considerations concerning the word of God, let us think about how we may study it more effectively. While the Bible claims inspiration for itself and bears marks of its divinity on every page, we should not forget that man has been left to make his own investigation of its contents and apply its righteous principles to his own life and conduct.

### ***Needed: An Honest Heart:***

We should approach the study of God’s word with honest hearts. This simply means that our minds will be open to an unprejudiced

consideration of anything and everything about which the Bible speaks. It is very difficult to be completely unbiased in any matter. Especially, it seems, is this cue when men consider religious matters. The fact that our souls and their eternal destiny are involved, however, should stir us to be unusually careful that we seek to know simply and only what God's will is that we may do it acceptably.

We are prone to develop our own religious concepts in the light of past training and experience. If we have been taught that it makes no difference what one believes as long as he is sincere the tendency is to allow this sentiment to color all our thinking. Yet a very casual appraisal of this state of mind reveals the folly of such thinking. If it makes no difference what one believes as long as he is sincere in that belief then it logically follows that it actually makes no difference whether or not one believes anything the Bible reveals. The Bible declares that God is, that Jesus Christ is His only begotten Son, that men are sinners and cannot be saved apart from Christ and the plan of salvation God has provided through Him. The Son himself has declared, "if ye believe not that I am he ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24)... and "whither I go ye cannot come" (John 8:21). If it makes no difference what one believes, then these statements of Jesus are nonsense. The writer of Hebrews says, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is" (Heb. 11:6), but if it makes no difference what one believes then the man who believes that there is no God is as well off spiritually as the person who confidently affirms the existence of Jehovah. By reducing this popular notion to an absurdity we can see its fallacy. The reason it makes a difference what one believes is because what one believes determines what he will be and do.

Again, we may have our thinking clouded by parental influence to the extent that we are unwilling to think for ourselves for fear that we will reflect unfavorably upon the religious faith and practice of our parents. Some reason thus: "Whatever was good enough for my father and mother is good enough for me." This is a popular saying. Will it stand the test of straight thinking, however? If all our ancestors had taken this same

attitude toward the religious practices of their forebears most of us would yet be worshipping idols. This is no ridiculous conclusion. Most Americans are of Gentile descent. Before Christ came the entire Gentile world was as heathen in its religious concepts and practices as the peoples of earth today who have not received the spiritual enlightenment which comes only from the gospel of Jesus Christ. Somebody's parents changed their concepts and convictions. If they had not changed we who are their children and like wise our children after us would be bowing before the shrine of some graven image. Saul of Tarsus changed from an ardent advocate of the Jewish religion to a simple follower and servant of Jesus Christ. He loved his parents but he loved Christ more. Every apostle of Jesus once espoused the religious faith of his fathers but all of them gave it up to serve Christ.

An honest man will always accept truth regardless of where he finds it. The story is told of a young man who succeeded his father in the operation of a general mercantile store. A government inspector called on him to check the accuracy of his scales and the yard stick with which he measured cloth. When the inspector applied the government's standard measuring yard stick to the stick of the young merchant he found that the young man's stick was not a yard long. It measured only 35 inches. When the young merchant's attention was called to his defective stick he became enraged and began to abuse the inspector. Said he, "My old father sold goods here for fifty years. He was an honest man and he used this same stick for years before he died. When you say this stick is only 35 inches you are reflecting upon the integrity of my father. He was not a shyster. He was an honest man!" The inspector quietly replied, "I am sure that you are telling the truth about the honesty of your father, young man. I have no reason to think your father ever intended to sell anybody less than 36 inches for a yard. But let me ask you something: Since your father was an honest man, as an honest man if he had learned that his measuring stick was an inch short of standard, what would he have done?" The young man cooled off. He saw the point. "He would have

given up the old stick, sir, and obtained one that measured 36 inches,” the young merchant replied. So it is with every person who is interested in truth. The honest man will not seek to hide behind either the ignorance or shortcomings of his parents’ religion once he learns their knowledge and practice did not conform to the requirements of God’s word. The honest heart is open to the truth of God and will espouse it regardless of the cost involved.

Too many people form their own notions as to how things ought to be religiously without regard to divine authority. The person who assumes that one church is as good as another and disregards what the Bible teaches about the church is closing his mind to the word of God. The man who assumes that sprinkling and pouring are baptism by heaven’s authority without studying the Bible to learn God’s will is treating the Bible with contempt. He who wears a human religious name, insists on mechanical instrumental music in the worship, accepts majority rule in a church, thinks the church should sponsor athletic activities and furnish recreation for young and Ad, and advocates a host of other things as religious activities and responsibilities of the church, needs to examine his own heart and see if it is being ruled by his own personal will or is subject to the authority of Christ. To assume that everything is to be practiced in the name of Christ without first determining what the will of Christ is in such matter is to be basically presumptuous concerning one’s own importance. Actually this process of thinking and acting makes the will of God bow to the will of man. The honest person will seek to know God’s will first and then endeavor to make his own will harmonize. – 1954 ■

## Amazing Psychoanalytical Powers

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

I stand amazed at the psychoanalytical powers of some folks. They are able to probe God’s mind to determine what is the “spirit” of His law and determine the “reason” behind His every command. So, they assure us that they are obeying the “spirit” of His commands and paying more

attention to the “reason” behind certain commands than they do to the wording of the command itself – even when God has not revealed the reason, which he does not always do.

They not only use this great power to probe God’s mind, they are also able to psychoanalyze the minds of teachers before labeling them as “true” or “false” teachers. The teachers may be spewing forth “damnable heresies” (cf. 2 Pet. 2:1) but before they can mark them “false” they have probe their minds to see what their motives and intentions are. A “damnable heresy,” if followed will damn the soul regardless of the sincerity or the lack thereof of the one teaching it. God did not burden us with the responsibility of determining why another teaches what he does, but has called upon us to be fruit inspectors. We can know them by their fruits. (Matt. 7:20).

Some even imply that we cannot really help a wayward brother without first psychoanalyzing him to see what makes him tick. It is sometimes implied that until we have developed such ability that we are not qualified to help one with his problem (sin). By such analyzing we could, at best, only determine what *we think* makes him tick. While we may need to consider what we know about the person’s background, we are limited to what is outwardly obvious or what he has chosen to tell us. Most of us ordinary preachers/teachers have to be content with not having the ability to probe the deeper recesses of the mind. We just have to take what we can know and then as wisely as serpents and harmlessly as doves, take the word of God in hand and try to teach them the right way. Their problem and its solution is not so complex as to require our being able to probe the deepest recesses of the mind, but rather simple. Since what they are doing is obviously contrary to God’s word – then try to help them see their error and develop the will to quit it.

Yes, these are amazing powers indeed, especially in view of the fact that the Bible says: “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:11 NASB)