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"AND YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE."—John viii, 32.

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DUTIES OF CHURCH OFFICERS

(Paper read at the Presbyterian Workers' Conference held at Haines Institute, Augusta, Ga., January 31st to February 3rd.)

By Rev. J. W. Smith

What I shall say here about the above subject will be a digest or interpretation of the duties as found in the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., which has the Scripture for its background. The office of elder appears in two divisions: the preaching elder and the ruling elder. The preaching elder is the minister and bears many titles: Messenger of God; Angel of God; Shepherd, etc. His duties are parallel with those of the Church of God, and the office is coexistent with the Church itself. It is not this division of the office, however, that I will say most about, but the ruling elder, which office, like the former, is coexistent with the Church.

History. A brief review of the history of this office will, perhaps, help us interpret the duties thereof. The first Biblical reference to ruling elders, who may be regarded as church officers, is found in connection with the history of the Children of Israel while in Egypt. Exodus 3:16, "Go, and gather the elders of Israel together." In the Hebrew theocratic state the elders were the legal representatives of the people, and were systematically organized into courts with lower and higher jurisdictions. Exodus 18:21, "Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and put such over them, to be rulers of thousands and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties and rulers of tens." In the time of Christ the synagogue system was generally in vogue among the Jewish people. The people under it were associated together in synagogues or in congregations for worship and godly living. They were governed by bodies of men called elders. Acts 15:15, "And after the reading of the law and the prophets the elders of the synagogue sent unto them." The elders constituted the bodies called the local sanhedrins, which exercised judicial functions within limited districts, while the control of the affairs of the Church and State as a whole were vested in a supreme council composed of priests, elders and scribes, designated as the great sanhedrin. Under this same Jewish system our Lord lived. One of the first acts of His ministry was performed in the synagogue at Nazareth. (Luke 4:1). And He shows that he recognized the synagogue, in the expression, "Tell it to the church." Matthew 18:17.

The gifts that were sent to Jerusalem by the Christians at Antioch were received by elders. "And sent to the elders by the hands of Paul and Barnabas." Acts 11:30. Paul and Barnabas "ordained elders in every church."

Further, the chief ruler in the synagogue, referred to in Acts 18:8, was probably reproduced in the parochial bishop of the New Testament Church; the local sanhedrin was modified and established as the Session; the Presbytery was organized as a court, and the great sanhedrin became the model of Synods and General Assemblies and Councils. In all the several judicatories thus indicated, elders were members, associated with those to whom it had been entrusted to preach the Word of God.

In the first General Assembly, and when the Apostle Paul made his report on his first missionary journey, elders were pres-

ent, and later elders were encouraged by the Apostle Paul.

The office took an important change in the second or third century of the Christian era—when the office emerged into that of the ministry to the extent that ministers had absolute control of affairs and the people had no voice. The mistake was discovered which reveals itself in the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation of the sixteenth century took place and the Church returned to the old landmark; the office of ruling elder was restored under the influence of Calvin and others.

We are to deal, however, with the duties of church officers. That of ruling elder is first in its historical connection and first in importance. The duties of ruling elder are directly connected with the Session of the Church to which he belongs and are pointed out by the Form of Government. They may be generalized in the following manner:

1. Attendance at Session meetings. Ruling elders should be present at every meeting of the Session of which they are members, unless unavoidably prevented. They should be prompt in their attendance. Promptness and regularity on the part of the members will keep the business of the Session well in hand, promote sympathy with and knowledge of the work of the church and advance in many ways its general welfare. Neglect in these particulars works inevitable injury to the best interest of the congregation and is out of harmony with the vow they take, "Do you promise to study the peace, unity and purity of the church?" Of course they always answer in the affirmative.

2. Loyalty to the Session. Differences as to policy are natural in administrative bodies. To this rule the church is no exception. These differences, however, should never be allowed to influence the relation of the members of the Session one toward another, or to be spoken of to any person other than members of the Session. The business of the Session should be kept in the Session. If members of the Session would be loyal to the opinion of the Session and not to personal opinion the differences in churches would be minimized ninety per cent.

Further, the members of the Session should be careful to avoid the appearance of unkindness one toward another, either in word or deed. As rulers in the house of God, in their mutual relations they should speak the truth in love, should be patient, charitable, gentle, and at all times sustain and defend one another.

Again I say, the ruling elders should remember their responsibility to the Session, and should avoid at all times giving the impression that they act independently of each other, and not until the Session works as a unit will the realization of these blessed words be ours: "We are not divided, all one body we;

One in hope and doctrine, one in charity."

The maintenance of the unity of the Session in all its actions is fundamental to its own influence for good as well as the welfare of the church.

3. Welfare to the Pastor. The ruling elders are the pastor's divinely appointed helpers in his arduous labors. They should carefully respond to his request for assistance in the work of visitation and conduct

of devotional service. However they may differ with him in policy they should never allow these differences to become obstacles to the work of the church. Elders too often forget these duties which are theirs by virtue of their office and which are binding by virtue of their promise, "Do you accept the office of Ruling Elder in this congregation and promise faithfully to perform the duties thereof?"

4. It is the duty of the ruling elder to be present at every church service, both on the Sabbath and during the week. Their prompt attendance will be of great help to the pastor, will stimulate others to come and will increase their own influence for good. Many a church suffers in the matter of proper attendance only because the elders fail to attend regularly. Church officers ought to be an example to the flock in their fidelity to the obligation resting upon all Christian people of regular attendance upon the worship of Almighty God. Elders should not only be an example in church attendance, but their conduct in their private and public lives should be an example to "the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." By the power of example, elders influence many souls to faith in Jesus Christ, encourage weak Christians who are trying to follow the Saviour and influence the congregation in general for good. "A godly life is an epistle known and read of all men."

5. Ruling elders should put to practice continually the counsel given the church at Ephesus by the Apostle, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Ruling elders are in one sense "shepherds," and should put into execution the ideas involved in that word, subject to the authority of the Session. They should be guides, protectors, counsellors to the members of the church. In all matters of importance they should take counsel with the other members of the Session prior to action, and should report regularly to that judicatory.

6. Ruling elders should by every means possible bring themselves into sympathetic relationship with the young of their church. The period of youth is, from one viewpoint, the period of danger, and the proper influence exerted by the elders may decide both their temporal and eternal welfare. Again, it is from the young that the main growth of the church is secured, the majority of conversions being persons between fifteen and twenty-five years of age. The elders, therefore, as they have in mind present additions to the church, and as they desire earnestly its welfare when the generation to which they belong shall have passed out from labor to reward, should seek diligently the friendship of the young, leading them to Christ, instructing them in the truth, and preparing them for high usefulness in the Redeemer's service.

Second, we shall consider the duties of deacons. The constitutional qualifications for this office are very similar to those of the office of ruling elder, the difference being that male or female may be elected to the office of deacon. This office is referred to in the Form of Government Chapter III, section 2, as one of the perpetual offices in the church; that is, it cannot be laid aside at will. In the sixth chapter of the Form of Government we read, "The Scriptures clearly point out deacons as distinct officers of the church, whose business it is to take care

of the poor and to distribute among them the collections which may be raised for their use. To them also may be properly committed the management of the temporal affairs of the church."

A brief history of the office will corroborate the foregoing statement. The origin of the deaconate is narrated in Acts sixth chapter and the first seven verses. The office had its equivalent in the Jewish synagogue in the office specifically appointed for the care of the destitute. A special emergency in the church at Jerusalem, arising out of the neglect of certain widows in the distribution of the common fund was the occasion of its establishment in the Christian Church. For a considerable time thereafter the office was limited to the serving of tables and the care of the poor. Gradually the deaconate was regarded as a necessary step to the priesthood. Like other church offices, it has been diverted from its original purpose by the Roman and other so-called Catholic Churches. The Apostolic deaconate was revived in the Reformed Churches as early as 1526. Calvin regarded it as indispensable and the care of the poor as its proper sphere. In the German and Holland Reformed Churches it is the duty of "the deacons to collect and distribute the alms and other contributions for the relief of the poor or the necessities of the congregation and to provide for the support of the ministry of the gospel." A similar duty is assigned to the office in the majority of our Presbyterian Churches.

The general duties assigned by the church to the deacons is the care of the poor. In many churches they are also entrusted with the charge of the arrangements in connection with the Lord's Supper. In some churches they are made trustees. The Form of Government, chapter 21, section 1, empowers deacons to preside over public worship in vacant churches.

Deacons, no more than elders, can act on their individual responsibility. They should organize as a board and have their regular meetings. According to the Form of Government the pastor is to be Moderator, but the Secretary and Treasurer should be elected from the members of the board.

Trustees. Trustees are church officers elected to manage the temporal affairs of the congregation, subject, however, to the will of the Session. This trustee system finds its origin in the antagonism of the State in the early period of American history to the Presbyterian and other Churches. With the achievement of American independence came religious liberty and legislation which enabled all the churches freely and adequately to hold and manage their temporalities as a church.

The powers conferred upon church trustees by the laws of the different States vary from full authority to manage down to mere title-holding. Care should be taken, therefore, to ascertain in each State the exact powers given to the trustees. In many of the States, such, for instance, as New Jersey and Kentucky, the trustees of religious societies are simply the title-holders to property and have no independent authority in its management and disposition. Both the decisions of the civil courts and deliverances of the General Assembly point out very definitely that the trustees are subject to the will of the Session.

Whether the trustees constitute the corporation or the officers of the incorporated congregation, they should hold regular meetings for the transaction

of business. The place and time of these meetings, with other detail duties, should be described in by-laws of the incorporated body. Said by-laws must, at all times, be in accord with the laws of the Church and State.

BARBER COLLEGE NEWS

By Mary Coleman

With the second quarter examinations over the college girls have started on their last quarter's work. We are almost counting the days as Spring approaches, with the trees budding out, the grass springing up everywhere and the birds coming up from the South.

On Tuesday morning, Miss Foresman told us about the Conference which she attended at Nashville, Tenn. She spoke of the different phases of work which were stressed by different speakers. She spent Sunday in Birmingham and attended services at the Sixth Avenue Presbyterian church which has one of the best equipped Sabbath schools in the country.

On account of the bad weather last Sunday, the school held service in the chapel.

Miss Barr was a pleasant visitor with us a few days last week.

We are very glad to report Miss Naomi Ramsey, of the present Senior High graduating class, and Miss Joetta Stinson, of the Junior College class, are rapidly improving from operations for appendicitis and tonsillitis, respectively.

A group of college girls with Mary Coleman as hostess gave a Valentine party in the college parlor the Monday preceding Valentine Day. The parlor was artistically decorated for the occasion. There were several guests from out in town. Games were played, after which a delightful repast was served. All reported having had a wonderful time.

We regret very much that Miss Ethel Lou Young, of the Freshman class, had to go home on account of illness. We hope for her an immediate recovery.

On the wall of every girl's room is a picture sent by Miss Forbes' Missionary Society. We are very proud of and thankful for them.

Wednesday night a birthday party was given by Miss Viola Funderburk in honor of her birthday. The guests had a jolly time playing games and partaking of the delicious refreshments.

We were very glad to have with us on last Sunday Dr. Crayton from Tuskegee. He is always a welcome visitor.

Miss Anne Wiggin is here representing the Student Friendship Work of the Y. W. C. A. She gave us wonderful talks on "True to the Job" and "International Relationships." The "Y" members are planning to give a camp-fire lunch for Miss Wiggin before she leaves.

BETHANY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NORFOLK, VA.

Sunday morning, March 11th, at 11 o'clock, Mother and Child Day was observed. At this time a special program was rendered. A wonderful talk on "Health" by Dr. S. I. Moore, a very stirring welcome to the mothers by Mrs. J. R. Dungee, and the short but impressive sermon, subject, "The Constant Love of God," by the pastor, Rev. F. D. Nance, were main features of the program. Mrs. S. I. Moore very capably presided at the piano, accompanied by Mr. R. B. Dungee, trumpeter.

We were very sorry to have our efficient Superintendent, Prof. J. R. Dungee, absent from

Sunday school Sunday, on account of illness.

The Westminster Guild will meet at the home of the Misses Brown on Marshall Avenue Wednesday afternoon, March 14th.

The Woman's Missionary Society had quite a success with their Pew Rally on the fourth Sunday. They are glad to state at this writing that they have raised their full quota.

The Norfolk Neighborhood Chapter of the Armstrong League held its annual meeting in February at which time Dr. Gregg, Principal of Hampton Institute, was the speaker. The President, Prof. J. R. Dungee, presided.

Mrs. Bethel Watson, after an extended visit to her relatives at Monroe, N. C., has returned.

The Pig Foot Supper, given by Mesdames Watson and Lomax, at the former's residence, was an enjoyable affair. Quite a neat sum was realized.

CHESTNUT STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH NOTES, WILMINGTON.

Sunday morning the Rev. N. A. Johnson, our pastor, gave us a most interesting sermon on Jonah, showing how often we run away from God's call to service and as God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, so he sends the great fish of difficulty, sickness, disappointment, etc., to us when we fail to answer His call.

The Sunday night program consisted of stereopticon views, picturing Gethsemane. Mr. E. C. Grigg sang most effectively "Gethsemane." The closing song, "Abide With Me" (illustrated), was sung most feelingly by the congregation.

The Missionary Society met in its monthly meeting March 5. Mrs. E. C. Grigg was elected delegate to the Presbyterial. We are preparing to repeat the pageant, "America for Christ." The mission study, "See for Yourself," was led by Mrs. Grigg. Mr. John Whiteman, Sr., continues ill at his residence, N. 7th St. His sister, Mrs. Carrie W. Davis, of Philadelphia, is with him. We are glad to report the other sick members of the congregation are convalescing.

Miss Thelma McRae, daughter of Mr. John McRae, who was a patient at the State Sanitarium for several months, passed away February 28 and was funeralized from the church, March 1. Up to the time of her illness Miss McRae was a faithful member of the church, and being taken in her youth reminds us all of the brevity of life. Many beautiful flowers were given as a tribute of love.

The Pioneer Girls gave their first party last month. The main feature was supervised play, consisting of games and folk dances. The afternoon was greatly enjoyed by all.

CEDAR GROVE COMMUNITY NOTES.

By Mrs. Hattie A. Russell.

Sunday, February 26th, was a fine day and we had a well filled house. Our pastor, Dr. L. J. Melton, brought to us a fine sermon. He spoke from the subject, "Seeing for Yourself." This sermon was greatly enjoyed by all.

Sunday, March 4th, our Sunday school was largely attended. The lesson for the day was a good one and was beautifully explained by some of the teachers.

The oyster supper which was given on Monday night, February 20th, was quite a success. We were glad to have so many of our friends with us that night, and many of them ex-

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