



The Pulpit Exchange

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading (Nehemiah 8:8). Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend (Proverbs 27:17).

Volume 10, No. 9

Issue # 1009

What It Means to Contend for the Faith in the Church

We are Contending for the faith in the Church in administration. For a Scripture reading, I would like to turn to an Old Testament account which is very familiar in 1 Samuel 8:1–9. “And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. (2) Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in

Beersheba. (3) And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

(4) Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, (5) And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. (6) But the thing

IN THIS ISSUE

Administration

**What It Means to Contend For the Faith
In the Church** 225

Administration

Church Administration 238

Administration

The Value of a Bishop Board 249

Book Reprint

A Talk With Church Members 257

displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. (7) And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. (8) According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have

forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. (9) Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.”

There is only one foundation to build on. As we look at this Old Testament account we see how the children of Israel were under a Theocratic government where God was their King. God had appointed judges, and lead-

Vol. 10 No. 9, Issue # 1009. The Pulpit Exchange is a compilation of written sermons without commentary, published as often as possible, in the interests of promoting sound preaching in our conservative Anabaptist churches. All sermons have been transcribed and printed with permission. Names are removed so that we can focus on the message and content rather than on a certain speaker or style. (Names will be published in the next issue).

Messages have been selected on the basis of topic rather than the speaker. Messages have been selected from congregations or speakers within the Berea Amish Mennonite Fellowship, Conservative Mennonite Church of Ontario, Conservative Mennonite Churches of York and Adams Counties, PA., Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, Mennonite Christian Fellowship, Nationwide Fellowship Churches, Ohio Wisler Mennonite, Washington-Franklin Mennonite Conference, and certain selected unaffiliated Amish Mennonite congregations.

We welcome submission of recorded sermons, topics, school meetings, writer's meetings, and special conferences by ministry and laity (where recording is permitted) provided permission has been obtained by the speaker for the recording. Submissions must have a title, the name of the speaker and the congregation responsible for recording (date would be helpful).

Published by Door of Peace Publications/Les Éditions «Porte-de-Paix» a conservative Amish Mennonite/Anabaptist publisher
c/o Keith G. White, 4678 25th S/R, RR #3, Thornton, ON L0L 2N0

Cost per Issue \$4.95 + \$2.50 p& h Canada/ \$3.50 p& h USA

ers. They were a unique nation like no other nation on Earth in that God was their king. They had been operating this way, history says, close to four hundred years. They had enjoyed the benefits and blessings of having God as their supreme Ruler. Theocracy is when God rules. God had miraculously provided for them. They were blessed above all people on the earth.

This is a type, the forerunner of the New Testament Church in which God still rules over the Church under a Theocratic government. There are several points I would like to look in this Scripture as the children of Israel made this choice. They had an idea. It is true as we often hear that ideas have consequences.

1) *It is serious to reject God whether from outright rebellion or by reactionary spirit.* It is usually one of those two points which cause people to choose a different course. God told Samuel to “protest solemnly unto them” (verse 9), the cost of rejecting Him. Samuel was to comply with them in their course but to “protest solemnly.” Down through the next verses we can find six times the phrase “he will take . . . he will take . . . he will take.” “This will be the cost. There is a cost involved. It will cost ‘your sons’ (2 Samuel 8:11),

‘your daughters’ (verse 13), ‘your vineyards’” (verse 14).

Often with the choices and decisions that we make the consequences really cannot be seen at the time. Over a period of time it is hard to distinguish the deviation, but as time progresses we will see it more and more. One of the spacecraft (the Voyager I think it was) man was able to determine down to minute details because of the laws of nature that they could propel a spacecraft into space and with complete accuracy hit their intended target because of the laws that God has ordained and put in place.

The account is given that they miscalculated by three seconds (that is trivial — three seconds) yet the outcome on the other end was thirty-one miles. It was a three-second mistake. As we look at the choices and decisions that we make, or maybe the decisions that had been made, in the course of time initially there is very little error. It is not a big issue. Yet, as time continues, it becomes more and more obvious that we are on the wrong course.

That is an example of working with machinery. However, we are working with souls. The decisions and choices that we make sometimes, cannot be called back. Souls are involved, the souls of our families, and that

is the cost.

II) *Leaders can make mistakes or have failures which can cause a reactionary spirit in people to make wrong choices.* Samuel's sons perverted judgment and we see the people reacting to that. They misused the office which they were responsible for and had been called to. We in our humanity, in our mistakes that we make, need to properly acknowledge those failures, because we are faulty vessels. We do make mistakes. However, if they are not acknowledged and taken care of leaders can cause others to make some reaction to that. Very often we see that.

We especially see it in homes. We are talking about administration. A father may have a very domineering, demanding type of administration in his home. Since he is overbalanced in that his sons may react to that. Therefore, as they grow older, they may say, "If father is that way, I will be this way," and they swing far to the other extreme. We see children raising their families where there is no administration at all. The children do as they please because the next generation reacted to something that was not pleasant.

We see this in people in

church settings. There may have been something that was unpleasant or maybe not as it should be. Therefore, we take the church leader, maybe the position of the church, what the church has stood for, and we take the type of administration, and kind of lump them all together. We kind of wad them together and the whole thing goes. We see them come around then with the new and improved models. We see it happening over and over again. It must be remembered that we cannot divorce God from His ordained leadership or His appointed method of administering to His Church because to do so is to reject God. It is simply that serious.

II) *There are no new and improved models to the principles that are laid forth in the book of Acts for the Church.* There is a thinking that the Church is evolving and is getting better. However, we believe that the principles that are set forth in the Word of God for the Church even though in their infancy is still God's standard for the Church.

III) Church history illustrates what we are seeing. There were basically three distinct church administration structures that came out of the Reformation including the Roman Catholic

Church. Val Yoder, in his book *I Will Build My Church*, looking at the Catholics says, "It is interesting that the seven Ecclesiastical positions of the Roman Catholic hierarchy exactly parallel the governing system of the empire it was within."

We all understand that. It was structured such that the laity's access to God was through the different structures, through the Pope, priests, bishop, and others. During the Reformation men saw the abuses including Reformation leaders like Luther. "Luther's theological break from the strong authoritarian control based primarily on the outward conformity to the mandate of the church to a premise of faith only was a spring board from which a more loosely controlled church structure emerged. With authoritarianism gone a new platform of equality emerged in which priests and laity stood independently beside each other with a faith that was too personal and private to be judged of each other."

"Reformation theology produced a church ideology which in practical meaning stripped the pastor of any meaningful authority. Luther, Calvin and other Reformation leaders were still too Catholic in their thinking to launch their new found 'faith

only' ship in the seas of each man doing that which is right in his own eyes. Yet, the stage was set in which the church was stripped in its ability to meaningfully speak to the daily living practices of the laity." In a nutshell it was a reaction from a strong authoritarian control and deadness. They reacted to that, wadded it all up, and pitched it out. Therefore, they formulated a platform of church administration where all are equal — ministry and laity — and that is a partial truth. Yet, in essence they were not fulfilling the responsibilities of their leadership responsibilities.

Luther later saw this at the end of his life. "The disappointment of their hopes was captured by Martin Luther late in life when he grieved at the lawlessness of those under grace was worse than that of under the papacy." Decisions were made and directions chosen in administration of the church which in the time it started sounded spiritual. It sounded good. There was an equality. The Catholic church form of government depicted the government. However, in the Protestant movement, the word now was community. They had something in common here, common ground. Nevertheless, it stripped the ministry of their

responsibility within the church and later they saw the lawlessness and end fruit of those who claimed to live under grace. The end product of it was worse than who were under papacy, who were under the Catholic government type administration. Again, the course was set. The direction, by the time they saw the difference, was too late. How many lives, souls were hurled in a direction that they could not retrieve?

The Anabaptist's configuration of the Church did not position the pastor on a superlaity pedestal. In fact, some of the early leaders refused to have an elevated platform at the front in their buildings to further show their equal standing with the laity. The Anabaptists out of that movement now, rather than in reaction to what they were coming out of looked at the Word of God and tried to model after the Early Church.

They recognized that we are on equal standing. There is not a superiority of the ministry above the laity. They recognized the truth that we are all on equal footing standing before God. Neither were they comfortable with a Protestant bystander model. The Anabaptist model involved the concept of a family in which each member was

expected to develop by God's grace, a loving servant's heart toward all other family members. The pastor was to be a role model in this picture. He did have responsibility and leadership but he was clearly a servant.

The Anabaptists sought to bring into balance the one stream with its authoritarian rule and the other stream of the community model. Therefore, they chose the middle road and what we believe was the Scriptural road which was near what God has ordained in the book of Acts. The Anabaptists were more concerned about the freedoms of the congregation than they were about the right of private interpretation. They highly respect the local corporate interpretation which did not conflict with the clear essence of Scripture. Though the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century had many imperfections, it most faithfully represented the unbroken heritage of the Early Church in its doctrine and practice.

IV) *How do those choices and decisions in administration affect us today?* The Church throughout history has been struggling to maintain a balance in staying in the middle of the road. It seems like, from time to time she veered off to the left in the authoritarian mode then she

would react to that and maybe swing over to the other side in the Protestant type theology.

In Kentucky the roads are narrow and a lot of the roads had a sharp drop off on the shoulder and they are extremely dangerous, especially if you are not accustomed to it or are an inexperienced driver. From time to time some would drive down the road and drop off the shoulder. We would see it often happen that for those who were inexperienced or those who were careless to correct it they would swing hard to get it up on the road again because they had just a little bit of a ridge there to jump. However, in reacting to going off one side they would swing hard and often the car would veer over into the path of another oncoming car or either be found in the other ditch.

So often in our human nature we tend to do that to those things that are unpleasant, those things that are not as they should be. We react to that. We overcorrect and we are no better off than what we were to start with.

As I look at where we are today in our plain settings (I pose this as a question because I do not understand sometimes the thinking, the idea behind church administration and why they administer the way they do). The

decisions they make, the choices they make, I do not understand it. Yet, it almost appears to me that is it possible there is some over-reaction in looking at some conservative re-groupings and looking at the overall picture coming out of a setting where maybe they veered a little bit to one side strong leadership. (My parents came out of the Old Order setting, so my viewpoint is second hand). I have never experienced it firsthand. Yet, I think they may have overreacted. My intention is not to condemn one group or another. Rather, I am trying to find out where we are at and what direction we need to go. Is it possible that we reacted to that and we overcorrected and adopted the Protestant model where the administration cannot properly administer or lead the church as it should? Or, has it fostered individualism at a congregational level?

Again, I am simply looking at the fruit of what the churches are producing. I will share a few things. (I am always trying to figure out where a person is coming from and where a person is headed). As a young father of nine children, I appreciate the privilege of seeking help and advice from those that are more experienced whether it is in dealing with family issues or it is in

dealing with church issues. It is a blessing.

I see men who have chosen a conservative lifestyle for themselves yet their administration at home and in particular church leaders, the administration of the church, is producing something that is going a different direction from what they themselves have chosen or approve of in their lives. I believe them to be godly men. Again, I am not wanting to criticize. I am simply trying to think through where we are headed. We see where in their families and churches, the fruit is a liberal trend. If that trend continues, the gap will simply continue to widen unless there is some point of correcting.

While working in a VS unit, I had the opportunity to work with youth coming from various congregations. You get a sampling of what our congregations are producing — a lot of godly youth. Yet, there was something that was troubling me about the mind set of our young people, first of all, toward authority, toward the church, and toward any kind of structure. We had the guideline at the unit that if the home congregation which they came from was more conservative than the standard of the VS unit, then they were to abide by the home standards.

It was impossible to know what all the home standards were of all the youth coming and going. However, from time to time we knew where a church stood on a given issue and we would see the youth violating that. Therefore, we would confront them and ask them about it. So often the response was, “Oh yeah, the congregation has a guideline on it. Yes, it says that in our standard, but no one ever does anything about it.” It seems like the mind set or the “theology” that they are adopting is each man doing “that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). It is there if you chose it, if you want it, but you make the choice it is yours.

As a result of this they had difficult time in the VS unit because if you think there are a lot of rules in a congregational setting go to a VS unit sometime. You will find that it is rules, rules, rules. Somehow it seems like people are becoming less and less tolerant of discipline whether in corrective measures or in helping a brother to curb a trend that you see is dangerous for him or his family. It seems that so many people on the feeblest of grounds can divorce the church leadership on some fault of the administration and start another congregation.

Is it possible that we have been too influenced by the Protestant thinking and their type of administration? If Luther saw the fruit of that and was grieved by it, how much more in our day? The very nature of a democracy or democratic type administration is patterned after our Western civilization's type of government. Our leaders become servants of the people. Whereas in a theocracy, we are servants of God to the people and there is a vast difference there.

No, we do not fire our pastors. We do not fire our ministers. Yet, we somehow can divorce ourselves from them if they do not quite administer the way that we think they should and we can move on and start a church and find help somewhere. Is it possible that we could be rejecting God in those moves, and with some extreme costs involved?

The overall concept of authority in society around us is rejecting that or it is becoming very anti-anything authority. They want nothing to do with it. They distance themselves, and again possibly because of abuses that they have seen. Yet, the principles of authority still remain, and we cannot do away with them.

I have always been struck by

the account in Matthew 8:5–10. Jesus marvelled at this gentile, centurion soldier. “And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, (6) And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. (7) And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. (8) The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. (9) For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. (10) When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”

There are some things we can learn from this centurion in looking at our concept of authority. First of all, he was a man who was very clear and forthright. He was a man under authority. Whatever the authority over him dictated, that is what he passed on. He was unapologetic about his position of authority. It was not like “I am in charge, but these hundred men here we are ‘buddies.’ We are all

equals here and we will figure this thing out together. Whatever the majority here will pass direction we will go.” He was very unapologetic about his position. He had a hundred men under him. He was a centurion. He understood the power of authority. When properly aligned with each in his place, each recognizing his responsibility in his servant, and that he is a servant to those above him, that is power and things happen.

When his superiors issued an order he passed that along. It is not one of exercising “lordship over them” (Mark 10:42; Luke 22:25). Of course, in a military setting, that is the gentiles. There is the extreme we see in Jesus disciples’ the Scripture says that there was “strife” (Luke 22:24). Whenever we lose our concept of authority then it is always strife, power struggles, and dominating. It always brings strife when we lose our concept of authority. The other extreme is in the account in Luke 19 where Jesus talked about a man in the parable of the talents. He gave some to the men. And with that responsibility there was authority over that particular thing that they were supposed to do. Two of them exercised that authority in a proper way and it prospered. They were able to bring more

back to their master. Then he told them that because of their faithfulness in their right responses they will have “authority over” (Luke 19:17) more cities — even greater responsibility. In contrast to the one who did not assume his responsibility, he brought the condemning words, “Thou wicked and slothful servant” (Matthew 25:26).

Is it possible that we could adopt a theology or a type of administration where we are actually not fulfilling our responsibility and it could bring words of commendation from the Lord, you know where we are not properly guiding the church? It could be because of a reaction of someone who was abusing it on the other end of things. I pose that as a question. Nevertheless, the centurion had a servant’s heart. We are looking at it now strictly from a Roman and Jewish standpoint that the Romans were superior in that society at that time. This man was willing to humble himself and go to this “lowly” Jew (as we look at it from a human standpoint) and beseech on behalf of those who were under him, his concern for them. He was willing to humble himself.

I see the beautiful picture that we as God’s servants are clearly in a position of responsi-

bility and authority. Our overriding concern should be humbling ourselves before God on behalf of those under us. We need to have a proper concept of authority. Jesus said, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them" (Luke 22:25). That is because they do not have a concept of authority. If we have the proper concept that would only have a humbling effect upon us. Responsibility, accountability, and authority all need to weigh equally in church administration. They must never get out of balance. Yet, we recognize that God has entrusted us with responsibility and with that responsibility gives us authority to fulfill that responsibility. With that comes accountability that some day we must stand before an almighty God and give account of how we have administered His flock.

One brother shared in an ordination message one time that in ordaining (and I do not remember the percent he used if it was a 50% or whatever it was, the point is not a Scriptural term) he was implying that our chances of making heaven are 50% less. That was not a Scriptural term, but the point he was bringing out was the seriousness of the calling. With that calling if we do not properly fulfill it, we may lose having our goal of eternal

life. The greater the responsibility the less margin of error we have.

Let us look at Moses. There was no other man who spoke "face to face" (Exodus 33:11) with God. The Scripture implies that God talked to prophets through dreams, but to His servant Moses He talked "face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10). That one mistake that Moses made in misrepresenting God cost him being able to go into Canaan. Thus, we see the greater the responsibility the less the margin of error.

V) *Some practical points of a theocratic administration.* 1) There is no Scriptural precedent for a percentage vote or voting. No where in Scripture do we see any incident where a congregation in working through issues that they used a percent. Along with that, a majority vote, to me, is not a safe guideline to determine the will of God. Looking at Old Testament accounts over and over again the majority, let us say the large majority of the time was in error.

Take the account of the twelve spies. They spied out Canaan and came back. Ten had "brought up an evil report" (Numbers 13:32). They were clearly the majority and yet they were headed the wrong direction.

We have the account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18.

We have the account of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18 as Jehoshaphat and Ahab had joined in an unScriptural ties were going out to battle. Jehoshaphat wanted some counsel. Therefore, they got the prophets there and they told him, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:6). Yet somehow Jehoshaphat was not quite comfortable with that counsel. He said, "Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him? (8) And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (1 Kings 22:7, 8). The majority was clear for them to go forth into battle. Yet God used that one voice to warn that if they went into battle Ahab would not be returning.

The theme of the New Testament for Church administration is the unity of the Spirit, being on one accord, being of one mind (of course in harmony with the Scripture). I have observed that in my short time in administration. I was raised

under a democratic type administration in church life but I was not part of it in administration, but as a lay member. Nevertheless, I have seen the differences. Some of my experiences were a reflection of my carnality so I cannot share in a condemning way of the church in which I was a part of. Again, it was a reflection of the carnal spirit that I possessed at that time.

2) There is beauty in seeing a congregation, though diverse and having many opinions, where the Spirit of God brings those differences into harmony. Though we do not totally agree on a given subject yet we can give our united support to a given issue and we put it to rest.

So often in the percentage type voting there are those who come out on the "short end of things." The decision may go contrary to their thinking or they are never forced to come to grips with that decision. It leaves an unrest. It leaves the idea that if we can get enough votes (if we missed it by maybe 5%) and if we can rally enough brethren in six months we will force the ministry into bringing this to the floor again. In contrast, we can properly work through an issue. There may be those who would have a preference and they can-

not come up with a Scriptural reason, and it is preference, yet we ask for their support.

There may be a brother who is not agreed with a particular decision. Are we willing to put the brethren's meeting on hold until we can talk with him personally? We may find that his response is "I cannot support but we need to go ahead anyhow." Does our concept of support mean was that we are saying "You need to absolutely agree?"

Can we as brethren live with a particular decision? Can we support it? Though we would have a preference otherwise, and would choose that, can we see the voice of the brethren? Can we give ourselves to this? Can we then lay it to rest?" Then, it is not be raised again in two weeks or six weeks later. It is put to rest. I appreciate so much working in administration that way.

3) *The ministry needs to clearly lead in making decisions.* The leaders do not make all the decisions, but are clearly involved in giving direction and counsel and facing an issue. They take the counsel of the brethren in a brethren's meeting. I have always appreciated our brethren's meetings and there has been many times I have changed my mind after listening to the counsel of the brethren from dif-

ferent angles. Whether through their voice in the counsel room, or on a piece of paper where they write their counsel, we take that and we come back with a proposal to the group, and this is the voice of the church. Can you support it? Sometimes I am afraid we almost become apologetic of our position, or our responsibility. Yet, if it is properly viewed, it is nothing to boast about. It is nothing to be ashamed about. The ministry need to work through and lead our group through the issues.

We can think again of voting, the democratic type of administration where each voice is equal. There may be a brother who has forty years' experience who has been faithful. His vote (voice) is equal to that of a young brother who is young in the faith and inexperienced. Somehow something is out of balance. The ministry will be directly accountable for the direction of the church. Yet, in some settings they are reduced to one vote and you count the votes. (I understand that there are different ways of doing that even in democratic type administration). Nevertheless, I am looking at strictly the standpoint that the Bible, the New Testament, puts a premium on faithfulness.

Therefore, to me the counsel

of a brother who has a proven record of faithfulness in throwing himself behind the church, who is there when we need him, that vote should weigh much heavier in the ministry's decision making than a brother who is constantly pushing the guidelines or is critical. Nonetheless, we need to be

careful with that. Sometimes people react to that. I think you understand what I am attempting to present.

May the Lord bless each of you all as you continue in role and responsibility as leaders in the Church.

Church Administration

The Bible says there are “differences of administrations” (1 Corinthians 12:5). I will be sharing some of our experiences. No congregation has everything in perfect order. Each has their own faults, and failings. In spite of the differences of administration, each can have a working relationship together as congregations. There is no “one size fits all” formula that one particular type of administration will make everything run much more smoothly than it had in the past.

I would like to look at an Old Testament Scripture to make some parallels to our setting today and also look at New Testament Scriptures. I would like to make a parallel to the work of the Church in our day and time. To me, 2 Chronicles 15:1–15 is a picture of the Church in our time. Israel, as we study the Old Testament is a type of the Church. They constantly

went in cycles. There was a time when there was revival and they fell away into idolatry. They were influenced by the neighbouring countries and they fell away from the Lord.

In this particular Scripture, there are several things that I would like to look at. Unity is important in finding direction, and is a safe guideline for the Church. As we look at the Old Testament, the majority most often was not a safe guide to follow. I will be sharing from my limited past perspective of the church in a democratic type of administration. It is not my intent to put any congregation down because of the way it is administrated.

Let us praise God today that the Church has come out of some of that, and that as churches, we are constantly growing together. I trust that our congregations are maturing and becoming more

spiritual. I want to simply share some observations in looking at a majority vote versus a unanimous support in issues. The majority is not a safe guideline. In this account, as they renewed the altar of the Lord, they moved away from the idolatry. Idolatry is also prevalent today. It is simply “I” wanting to get on the throne and “I” wanting to control my destiny. Idolatry is simply setting up gods, setting up a form of worship where “I” am in control of things and wanting to be my own boss.

It is easy to administrate our congregations under that premise. We have work to try to manipulate church events, and often we may succeed in doing that. The Church will not prosper under that. Our congregations can renew the altar of the Lord which is simply to me when we return to the true worship of God, desire His will, and seek Him with our whole heart and soul. We come together unitedly seeking God. Second Chronicles 15:13 says, “That whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death.” I am thankful that we are not in the Old Testament setting. Nevertheless, there are still parallels. The principle is that people need to be guided to a decision to either unite with the

brotherhood or to seek something else.

Then in verse 15, as they sought God, as a united brotherhood, He was found of them. They found direction and they found “rest.” That has been our experience in congregational life. As we seek God’s will and open our lives to the brotherhood, we want the united voice of the brethren as our counsel, and we can find rest in that. The Spirit of God is needed to unite a group of people which is so diverse and different in their ideas and opinions. It takes the supernatural power of God to unite the brotherhood to give clear direction. Congregations can operate on a “political” basis. However, we can see by what is happening in our society that the majority is not a safe guideline. The majority is following after the ungodly evil things. Businesses operate under a majority.

There is a point and place in congregational experience where a simple raise of hands on minor issues is sufficient. However, I am talking about weighty issues — issues which will change the course and direction of the Church, or will cast her on a different slant. I am simply speaking of changes our standards of practice or discipline where we want the security of a united

brotherhood and that this is a safe direction to go. We need to be very hesitant to make any changes in our standards of practice, because there is something within us as people where there is a spirit of change, a restlessness, or a craving for things.

1) *Some Scriptural examples of majority rule.* 1) We have the account of the children of Israel as they came to the point of the promised land. Moses sent spies into the promised land to survey it. We know the account very well how ten of the twelve spies came back with a negative report. The minority, the two spies, sought clearly the will of God. Yet, people followed the majority counsel of those twelve spies — ten out of the twelve. God's will was very clear and evident yet the majority was contradictory to the will of God. It was very clear that God's will was that they were to go into Canaan. The idea was not for them to go and scout it out whether they should go in or not. They were to go in and scout it out in preparation of invading the land, or taking it over.

2) In 1 Kings 22 we have the account where godly Jehoshaphat joined forces with Ahab. They formed somewhat of a union — “affinity” (2 Chronicles 18:1) — and they

wanted counsel of the Lord whether they should go up to battle. Therefore, they sought counsel of the prophets. The majority of them said “Go up” (1 Kings 22:6). Zedekiah was one of the lead prophets there and he had a helmet with horns and he said, “With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them” (2 Kings 22:11). Somehow Jehoshaphat was still not settled in his spirit that this was the correct counsel. The majority was clear with one voice. The majority were saying that God says to go up to battle. Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him?” (2 Kings 22:7). They brought Micaiah to give his counsel. He told them, “Go, and prosper” (2 Kings 22:15). Ahab immediately said that he did not like Micaiah because “he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil” (2 Kings 22:8). Then, Micaiah told them what the outcome would be. “I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd” (2 Kings 22:18). He prophesied the death of Ahab.

Again, the majority was speaking one way. There was a lone voice. God has always dealt with a remnant. It was a violation of God's principle. A godly

man joined forces with a very wicked king. Jehoshaphat went against his better knowledge in discerning the will of God. He chose to go with Ahab and almost lost his own life in that account.

3) There is also the very familiar account of Elijah on Mt. Carmel against the prophets of Baal.

II) The New Testament model upon which church issues should be settled is found in Acts 15. The Early Church was a model which we should pattern after. Notwithstanding, we see here that they were not perfect either. They had their particular issues to work through.

1) We see the balance of the ministry leading out and yet under the authority of the Church. That is a delicate balance. It seemed that the Church was struggling with the ministry overstepping their authority. To me this is a beautiful picture of the balance of the brotherhood led by the ministry working through the issues. The ministry led out in this debate as they were directed by the Church. Under the authority of the Church they came to a unanimous conclusion on this particular issue. Acts 15:22 says, "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church." Verse

25, "It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul." They were able to bring a resolution even though it says in the beginning that it was "no small dissension and disputation with them" (Acts 15:2).

There were some strong feelings running on either side of this issue. Nevertheless, somehow they were able to work through it such that they were all able to come to a reasonable conclusion what was best for the Church and for the gentiles coming into the Church. The result of it in Acts 16 was that of a united voice. Acts 16:5 says, "And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily." God's blessing was upon that as they sought His will with a unanimous, perfect voice.

III) In the more theocratic type of administration the voice or counsel of a godly faithful brother and that of one who is a "fence rider" or who is perhaps lukewarm in his relationship with the Lord are not equal in weight. (I say this very charitably, very cautiously). Under the democratic type administration, you take a brother who has been faithfully serving the Lord for thirty- five years and you take the voice of an individual who per-

haps is only a novice in the faith, young, or inexperienced, and they are of equal weight — their voice counts as one vote. Brethren that is not safe. I say that charitably because I appreciate our youth. I appreciate the brotherhood, and I think there are times when I have seen in our church experience that there were youth who had greater insight in Scripture than some of our older brethren did. Therefore, age is not necessarily a safe guideline, because we have godly youth and their level of maturity at their age may be far ahead of me when I was at that point in my Christian experience. Nevertheless, there is something about experience that should carry more weight in a church issue than inexperience. To me that is common sense.

The Bible places a premium on faithfulness. Jesus used the illustration of giving talents to His servants. As they utilized those talents and brought back fruit from that He responded in giving more responsibility. Likewise, it is in the Church as we as a ministry observe the faithfulness of the brethren. As we take counsel of a congregational issue a brother who has been a faithful church supporter and willingly sacrifices for the Church, when he says something,

it carries weight to us. Yet, that sometimes is frustrating within the brotherhood. The cry is, “My voice is never heard.” Again, I say this charitably but if you feel like your voice is not being heard in the church, maybe God is speaking to you to re-evaluate your life. If we are honestly seeking the welfare of the church and promoting the kingdom of God, your voice will be heard. Yet, sometimes it is our actions in the past, maybe the way we responded in past issues that have caused brethren to lose confidence in our counsel. Maybe it was the way we responded. There may be times when our motives are maybe not pure in our counsel.

A brother may have strong convictions on a particular issue. Yet, he may know that we have agreed as a brotherhood that this is the way we will operate our service. It may become very obvious to us in discerning what his real motive is.

That one particular issue may affect our “weight” in discerning the counsel and weight of our concerns. We need to be sincere in sharing a concern and not gloss it over with so-called convictions when it is strictly a preference or something that I simply personally dislike or do not want to do.

Sometimes there are times when we share our concern and yet we sense an underlying motive is that we are trying to keep some children happy at home. We may have some restless youth. Therefore, we try to push an agenda to keep eighteen-year-old Johnny happy at home so he will not leave the church. Sometimes it is simply a discontented spirit that we are always wanting more liberties or more things. There again, we can spiritualize them and try to justify getting these liberties into the church. Or, there may be a brother who is slow to respond to the wishes and counsel of the church.

That is why so many people like a democratic type administration. It is simply a straight line vote. Actually, in the theocratic type of administration, it places a greater responsibility on the ministry to discern the voice of the church to give a proper proposal back to the brotherhood. We need to discern those voices. It has been a blessing to be able to share in that way and seek the counsel of the brethren. We can have confidence in them that they have the best in mind for the church. Nevertheless, there are those times when we need to weigh the spirits of the counsel of the brethren.

My plea with you is that your

life's testimony is the greatest weight that you can possess in your counsel. When the ministry can sense that your relationship with the Lord is genuine and you love the Lord as it should be, and you desire to further His church that is the greatest weight that you have there in giving clout to your voice, your recommendations, in the brotherhood.

3) *There is the need to bring all issues to a final rest.* There must be a final conclusion where everyone faces their response and their own will in a given issue. In church issues some congregations may have a 75/25% or an 80/20% split to pass. Some congregations may give the ministry 50% of the weight. Carnality becomes evident when we may push for an issue and we maybe get only 70%, and simply miss it by a couple of votes. The issue may not carry, but we are left hanging and we may be upset because it did not go through. We are not called to confront our feelings in that given issue. We are not made to surrender. The issue may be left hanging and those feelings smolder. It is so important in church issues that everyone needs to face their feelings and the issue is laid to rest. It is over.

It is not a thing where six months or a year later since we

missed it by a couple of votes, we will work this thing. If we can simply persuade a couple more brethren then we bring it to the ministry again and we go through that same cycle again. It creates a “Them against us,” feeling because we know exactly where the brethren were. We know what they are thinking and feeling.

When we face church issues, we have the same feelings and carnality to work with. When confronted with an issue, we have brethren that have varying opinions, but we say “It is time to give our counsel.” We can then share the exact procedure how we will give the counsel. At some point in time in the issue, all of us need to acknowledge publically either by a written consent of acknowledgement of yielding my will to the voice of my brethren or a raise of hands or some type of a response. We all are confronted with our feelings on the issue and we surrender. Then, we are united and we go on from there.

What I share with giving our support, I thought we were very clear on it. On a given issue a brother may have some strong feelings. We can personally meet with the brother and find out that he was not in agreement with what we were asking of the con-

gregation. We may ask him, “What are we to do?” He may respond, “Well, we need to go on.” However, we cannot go on because the brother is saying he cannot support it. We can go like this back and forth a little bit, Finally, we need to realize that we are missing each other in our communication of what we are calling support. He may think of support that he must agree. We are not asking for that.

We need to be asking, “Can you support it, but simply understand that I am of a different mind. If I had my preference, if I had my choice in the matter I would do it differently, but I can live with this decision. I yield my right. I yield my way to the brethren.” Once our communication is clear it should clear things right then. Is this typical sometimes in our church experience? We are there communicating. We are there so close and yet there is a wall there. We are not meshing. We need to realize that sometimes our brethren do not understand what we are requiring with regard to support. It is simply that we face the issue and that we say we understand that the brethren feel the way they do that I will lay down my idea. We may not totally be in agreement, but it is something that we can live with. It is not a

clear violation of Scripture. It is simply my preference. I am yielding my preference to that of my brethren, and then we are united in that voice.

It clears the air. When I say, "I support," I cannot go around and "speak evil" (Titus 3:2) of the other brethren. I cannot go around and rehash this issue. Since I support that means the issue is over as far as I am concerned. In the past that may have been our experience because there was so much rehashing or reliving that issue because we were never made to give up on our feelings.

4) *The ministry have a greater responsibility than simply counting the votes.* Again, I say this very cautiously and charitably. Hebrews 13:17 says, "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." The laity help the ministry to understand what they are accountable for as minister of the Church of God. That in turn helps them to understand what they are responsible for. The two must always be in proper balance. We can understand this principle in the home. Fathers are the head of the home. They

are responsible for bringing their "children . . . up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). However, if I say that you cannot make any rules or guidelines in your home, I am handcuffing you and you still will be accountable for those children and the choices they make in life, but yet you cannot give them direction. We say "That is impossible," and it is impossible.

It is not the ministers' responsibility to make all the guidelines. Nevertheless, I think it is their responsibility to lead out and have a larger role in giving direction to the Church and bringing the voice of the congregation. It is a delicate balance there between the counsel of the church and the ministry leading out. I am not sure that we can honestly say that we are always keeping it balanced. Maybe sometimes we get out of balance and we overstep our responsibilities and assume too much authority.

I will simply go through how we address a given issue for your consideration. You might do the same in a similar fashion. I appreciate our brethren's meetings. We call it a brother's meeting. We as a ministry present the issue at hand which we are facing. I appreciate the Spirit of

Christ that I sense in the brethren in our men's meetings. There is freedom to share opinions. There have been times when strong statements may have been made. We need to work to curb that. Nevertheless, over all there is a sense of freedom where we can honestly share how we feel on a given subject such that I know I will not be put down by my brethren.

There are many times when I have gone into a brother's meeting feeling on one side of an issue, but as I heard the counsel of the brethren and the ideas going back and forth I have changed my mind. I never thought of those things. I appreciate in our brother's meetings that we can have the diversity of brethren looking at it from all angles, and they think of something I never even thought about. When we have heard all the different viewpoints then we ask the brethren (we do not necessarily follow a pattern, depending on the given subject) either to come through as couples, through the counsel room and they verbally share their counsel at that time on a given subject, or we have in times past had them write their counsel.

Along with that we encourage them as much as possible to use Scripture or a Scriptural prin-

ciple why they feel the way they do. That is so important in our church experience. With a simple "yes" or "no" or raise of hands, we really do not need to share why we feel like we do. We could be very carnal in our response but a "yes" or a "no" was all we said. If we must give a reason why, we might change our mind because we might not be able to give a Scriptural reason. It is good for our brethren to be able to express themselves why they feel the way they do, why they are giving the counsel that they are, and as much as possible to give a Scriptural reason for it.

There again, the responsibility of the ministry then is to try to formulate the different responses and come back with a proposal which reflects what the brethren were saying. "This is the counsel of the church. Can you support that?" Then, we have a simple raise of hands. We give the option to disagree. Nevertheless, if one or two brethren would raise their hand, and say that they simply cannot support that proposal, they feel strongly otherwise, then we as a ministry would meet with them and hear their concerns. Many times it is simply a misunderstanding. We did not quite connect some place. Therefore, there was an uncer-

tainty on their part and they could not support. Most times, as far as I know, the issue was cleared by simply meeting with them because sometimes we missed each other.

The other option would be that you need to present your view to the brethren why you cannot support. That can be a fairly intimidating thing for most of the brethren to do when they know that they may be the only dissenting voice. Yet, we want to give that brother the opportunity if they truly have a Scriptural reason that they lay it out before the brethren. If it is truly a Scriptural reason we trust that the brethren will be discerning and may completely change their mind on the issue. However, most times they have needed to accept it. Sometimes it is simply our human nature. At that point they need to surrender their will to the brethren, and brethren God will give grace.

Sometimes we may express concern not of the issue itself, but as the church grows in conviction or needs to regain lost ground, how much further will we step back? What is coming next? It may be the insecurity that we are fighting with and not the issue itself.

God may be pulling us in a direction that we are not quite

ready to yield to. God can give us grace — the grace to surrender. How much will it matter anymore where the church goes in the conservative direction (or in recovering lost ground) if we are surrendered to it? In our experience God gave us grace. I did not see some issues right away, but God opened my eyes to some things and quite possibly if I would not have yielded at that point I would have never seen it. Once I surrendered my will, God gave grace for me to understand some of the principles that the brethren were trying to implement in the church in the practical ways.

Brethren, that is my encouragement. There are so many times we cannot see from the other brother's point of view. Yet, when we are willing to trust their counsel and yield our will, God gives grace, opens our eyes, and helps us to see the brethren's perspective and I find security in that.

What if it is a given issue that we simply cannot support or yield to? There are basically two options whether in the ministry or the laity. The first one probably 75% would take care of it. It may take repentance on the individual's part. Again, as I shared, so many issues are not the issues themselves. There is an underly-

ing problem. What we call convictions, what we think we have clear Biblical convictions on in all reality are preferences. Yet, there are some things that we have convictions on and we need to stand on if the church is adrift. We could sit here and argue all day on brown shoes and black shoes and these things, yet I think there is still the need for us to see the direction the church is moving.

I can say that I have convictions on a particular dress issue that I cannot point to Scripture thus and thus, yet I see the church moving in a direction that is unsafe for my family. There are issues that are clear and though we cannot say that we have outright convictions there are many people who come from churches that they felt were adrift and felt unsafe for their family anymore. Nevertheless, a need of repentance in our congregations, and in our attitudes in being able to come to face issues is important.

Secondly, there needs to be agreement among the brethren that if there is a given issue that you simply cannot support, or are not able to support the church and the direction we are going that you would consider relocating. We need to find a church setting where we can throw our-

selves behind in support and where we are supportive of the direction where the church is wanting to go. I say this very cautiously because I do not think moving largely is the answer.

We have the one and only account of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas where they separated ways. Yet, even in that it was done in a God-fearing way. It must not be done out of anger, or some ill last word hurled at each other before we move. It can be worked out in a God honouring way. It must be in a peaceful manner. In all we do we must do things in a God honouring way. Too many times we have left with bad words, bad feelings and haunting memories. God forbid. There are different ways of doing things and we recognize that.

We as congregations must stand for something. The Church must face issues. We cannot simply change our stand because a certain family moves to our congregation from another direction. Fairly soon we would have no direction at all. Therefore, families and individuals need to clearly analyze a congregation before they move in, and once you move in you put your whole heart behind it.

The Value of a Bishop Board

A valid and Biblical church life involves a right approach to her ministerial oversight. The church can function best when church order is understood and each knows what they are to do and what the other is also to do and respects the place of the other. A ministerial team functioning together with respect and appreciation for each other and each fulfilling their assignment results in the blessing of the Church. We could turn to a number of Scriptures where that thought is borne out.

To be Biblical, the local leadership needs to have an obligatory relationship beyond the local setting. We see that in the Scriptures. Further, we see that in the New Testament where the relationships reached beyond the local setting as well.

I would like to look first of all at I) *the fact of the bishop office itself as the Scriptures give it*. Then, II) *the work of the bishop*. That is necessary in order to III) *finally focus on the values of bishop board*. I) The Scriptures define the office of bishop, ministers, and deacons, and possibly they are defined more by implication than by direct discussion. Nevertheless, the work of each is very clearly indicated in the Scriptures. The office of the dea-

con is possibly the most clearly defined. Often there is a question or a debate as to whether there is a distinction between a minister and a bishop. Over the years there has been some debate on that. However, I believe the Scriptures make that kind of distinction.

The term that is often translated in the New Testament as “bishop,” is used a number of places in the New Testament. The term is also translated *elder* and occurs much more frequently. We believe that *elder* is the more general term and is used in reference to the ordained ministers in the New Testament while the word *bishop* carries with it the idea of a unique and distinctive assignment. Paul refers to it as “the care of all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:28). Sometimes the thought of oversight is set forth.

Historically, the Mennonite church in America has recognized this office. Those of you who are familiar with history remember how that in the early days of the Franconia settlement there was no bishop present. Therefore, there were no baptisms, or weddings until authorization came from Europe. That tells us that they recognized the office and the place of proper

authorization.

II) Let us look briefly at the function of this office by enlarging on its purpose and place. The usage of the term *bishop* may not be very clear in Scripture. Nevertheless the work this office represents both in Scripture, in history, and in our current conservative Mennonite church practice is clearly taught in the Scripture. There is a connection between the bishop office. We believe the bishop office is inherent in the apostolic office. The apostle Paul refers to himself as having “the care of all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:28).

While we do not regard our bishops as equal to the apostles by any means, the bishop office entails work that is similar to the work of the apostles. It is very clear that beyond the duties of the Christian ministry there is a well-defined function of oversight. The idea of oversight is one who is a bit more removed and is therefore able to identify trends and movements a bit more. That seems to be the thrust and the thought.

It is apparent that Timothy had a bishop responsibility to the churches at Ephesus, and Titus to the churches at Crete. It is interesting that in some of that writing it is referred to as “churches” not “a church.” It is churches — plu-

ral. If you read in our discipline in Article II, number 3 (I will not take the time to do that) there you have some defining of the work of the bishop. It lists the instructing of applicants, the receiving of members, ordaining, excommunicating, and the general oversight in the care of the churches. Therefore, beyond preaching and pastoring is the added responsibility of overseership as we would understand it, as applied in the Scriptures as well as in history.

Let us define that role and function a bit more in detail before moving into our assignment more specifically. 1) *The bishop serves as a pastor to the pastors.* Sometimes that is not always understood. Sometimes it seems that the bishop is expected to have an equally close touch with the congregation in the same way that the pastor does. First of all that is unrealistic. Secondly, it would actually be defeating the purpose and function of the office if the bishop is as close to the congregation as each of the ministers are. The bishop serves as a pastor to the pastors. He helps them to keep their objectivity. He is not as emotionally involved and maybe in a situation that has arisen. His experience elsewhere helps bring gifts of others to bear on the

local. There is such a thing as a bishop being too close to a given work. I already introduced that thought.

2) *Secondly, the bishop must maintain a shepherding touch.* That sounds like a paradox. Nonetheless, he does need to be involved to some degree with counselling of individual members, paying attention to individual's spiritual needs, visitation of shut-ins, instruction of applicants, and being in close touch in times of death. Without the shepherding touch, his administration will suffer. Therefore, while he has a bit more of a removed relationship there still needs that shepherding touch in order to be effective.

3) *The bishop helps to nurture and provide fellowship between congregations.* As we already have noted, Titus had charge of a number of congregations in Crete. This is to foster sufficient unity so that the right things will happen. Having unity among certain given churches certainly has been part of our church concept and church function.

This district concept helps us to cultivate a closeness within a smaller circle which is within a context of a larger. You cannot be equally close to a large circle as you can to a smaller circle.

Let me explain it this way. If you have a hundred people to relate to, you cannot be equally as close to them as you can to ten. That is the function our districts help to serve. It simply means that here is a circle that we can be a step closer to because we cannot be that close to the entire group. It would not be possible. It would not function. Therefore, the bishop helps to coordinate and keep moving properly that smaller circle, as it moves with the broader circle.

A lot could be said about what this smaller circle provides. The bishop supervises and helps to effect a uniformity of practice among the churches which facilitates a working together and helps to minimize competition.

There are church groups in history and there are church groups today who follow more of a congregational approach. I well remember reading about General Conference Mennonites who had this idea: *Uniformity in Doctrine but Diversity in Practice.* That is the opposite of the emphasis that our approach emphasizes.

The bishop is also the link to the broader church. This happens through the bishop board. That starts bringing us down to what our subject is. At this level the need of uniformity church-

wide comes into focus. Historians have noted that a united bishops' body was an important factor in maintaining conservatism in Lancaster Conference for many years. Some want to say that this united front was also what helped to pull the whole thing down into apostasy. I would simply say this, if something has the power to lead into apostasy it also would have the power to help go right, would it not? Therefore, that brings into focus the value.

III) *The value of the bishop board.* I want to discuss a bit some of the benefits that this brings to us as a church, why we want to put forth the effort to keep it alive, and to keep it functioning as we have experienced it and as we have enjoyed it. There is such a thing as bishops needing and counselling each other and inspiring each other for the work, but then they go home and do what they want to anyway. In some settings that is the way it works. That is not what we are talking about this afternoon. We are talking about a relationship where the bishops are actually answerable to each other and they have something to say to each other. That is what we mean by a bishop board. That is what we mean by a bishop function.

I have a number of points. I am not suggesting that these are necessarily listed in order of importance, but somewhat as they came to me. 1) *Through the bishop board, the experiences of one area of the church can benefit from another area.* I often think of this in our discussions on a bishop board level. The question always comes when an issue arises, Do we have a precedent? Did any of you ever face this before? That is a definite benefit that we on the local level enjoy through that touch on the broader circle. What did you learn as you faced this matter in this, in your area? Not everything needs to be learned through trial and error. We can learn from others and the experiences of others.

In fact, I have been impressed how often, even our older bishops who have touched, whose lives have worked with men that I never personally met, how often they quote them and how they faced something. That can also be a benefit that even stands time, and not merely the larger circle.

2) *Through the bishop, board the gifts of the broader church bear on the local church.* The bishop board is not the only way this happens. As each bishop works with his ministers and congregations, he gains a certain

perspective. As this perspective blends itself and draws together at bishop meetings, the entire church benefits. I would like to emphasize that. Sometimes individuals have a rather distant view of their involvement in church life. Your faithfulness, counsel, and contribution as an individual member as it relates to your ministry and your bishop finally has its influence. It finally touches even the broader church.

It is through the board that the gifts of the broader church bear on the local levels. The gifts are given to the church, not even to one bishop. That is a concept we need to keep clear — not even to the bishop board entirely. The gifts of the Spirit are given to the Church. They find their blending in, and there is a certain expression that is expressed as the bishops relate to each other and move together at that level. One may see this and another sees that. As that blends, the work of God can be accomplished.

3) *Through the bishop board wholesome checks and balances are maintained.* No man is safe without being answerable to peers. It is true of individual bishops as well. While the bishops are answerable to their congregations and to their ministry they are answerable to each other

in a sense that they are not answerable to other levels. It is a must that a bishop is answerable primarily to other brethren who share the same responsibility. That is an important concept. The bishops are answerable to each other and to those who share the same responsibility. That happens on the bishop board level, and it is a check and balance in our church life.

Hopefully there is not a conflict ever between the various levels of accountability, but if that should ever develop, the bishop is first of all accountable to his fellow bishops. That is a concept that goes along with the bishop board approach and with the Conference approach. Also, the bishops are free to tap each other on the shoulder and they answer to one another as to what is happening.

4) *Through the bishop board uniformity of practice is maintained churchwide.* Sometimes we take that for granted. Most of us have grown up with that approach. We do not realize the force that it is for right doing and for maintaining the faith. Diversity tends to the lowest common denominator. One does not need to observe much to soon discover that. Even in our own group there is some diversity. You cannot completely bypass all

of that. Nevertheless, uniformity helps to withstand the pressures, and especially the pressures of these end times.

The bishop board is not a lawmaker body. When the discipline matters are passed and there are things now that are established, there is still fine tuning and clarifying that needs to be done. As that is worked out together, it helps to keep the uniformity of the group moving in the same direction.

5) *The bishop board speaks out on current issues that effect churchwide.* While there has been some variation, there needs to be sufficient unity such that the rising generation can readily identify with the way we do. There can become enough diversity that after a bit the young people are not sure what our practice is anymore and then there is nothing for their conviction to hook on. There is teaching on the one hand and practice on the other hand. That practice needs to be sufficiently uniform so that the rising generation can make the link between what is taught and what is practiced. If that diversity becomes too broad they do not know where to hang the teaching. They do not know where to make the link. One has observed what has happened in many settings where that is true.

A churchwide standard is a definite aid in standing together and maintaining the faith in the end times. History tells us that. Even the Scriptures have something to say on that, and we want to benefit from that way.

6) *The bishop board helps to keep the group thinking together and moving in the same direction.* It helps to take the courage in leading out on issues and to face matters. I do not know of any one man who is big enough to take the pressure that is necessary to bring a group through. I do not believe there is one man big enough to handle that, but together it can be done by the grace of God. It is a blessing that we have that and we ought to appreciate it.

7) *Through the bishop board mutual trust and openness can be fostered.* I thought of Joshua 22:10–34. Remember the two-and-a-half tribes which stayed on the East side of Jordan. The rest had crossed over and were living on the west side. Then they heard that the ones that had stayed on the East side had set up an “idol” and they were worshipping. They got their army together and were going to go over and take care of the matter, did they not? When they got there, they found out it was not that way at all. That is one of the

functions that can happen through a properly functioning bishop board. It can minimize that kind of thing.

Often we hear this said, “Our congregation or district is planning to do this and this and we thought the rest of you should know it so if you hear about it, you will have the inside story on it.” That is right. That is what should be happening — the kind of thing that should be happening. Sometimes questions are raised, “What is happening?” Questions can be raised for clarification. This trust and openness is necessary for exchange of pulpits which is so necessary for healthy church life. It helps to minimize the competition between districts and congregations.

8) *Through the bishop board the tensions (not conflicts) associated with a conferring fellowship approach are resolved or made liveable.* Whether you have a home, business, or a congregation wherever there is close working together there are a certain amount of things that need to be resolved. We cannot get around it. I am referring to those things as tensions. These are things that must be worked with and worked through.

We have a vision for the benefits of a close working together,

a conferring relationship where we are answerable one to another. We have appreciated that approach. However, associated with this approach are tests and rigours that cause many people to turn aside from this very approach. Then, they do not have the benefit. There are efforts that need to go in to make this work that one could avoid if each would go their own way. Blending the forces of a group in the right direction requires a process that can be on one hand painful, but on the other hand very beneficial. Nevertheless, some actually do not want to face the vigours that go along with working out and working through and moving together. We certainly are committed to bear that price, are we not, in order to have a blessing?

Often this blending is a process, a process which requires time, deliberation, and patience. Sometimes the disunity that could come through a lack of carefulness would actually be worse than the issue itself. Therefore, care must be exercised. Often when one faces the responsibility of resolving a matter, the matter looks differently than when you do not have the responsibility. I am sure we have all faced times where maybe in a farming process or something, a

brother is having some problems, maybe it is your blood brother. Maybe some things were not working for him and you had all kinds of advice for him — here he could do this, and he could do this and he could do this and he could do this. However, when the day came when you were in his shoes suddenly you could think of five reasons for every one you gave him why it would not work. What is the difference? When it is finally a responsibility we face, sometimes it looks a little different. That is part of working out the conferring fellowship relationship, and it does take time.

We need to keep the bigger picture in focus as we labour so that issues are kept in proper perspective. That is one of the challenges, and one of the functions that go along with the board. We help each other to keep thinking right in the midst of the pressures one faces in church life.

9) *Through the bishop board a broader base for problem solving is employed.* That, of course, is mentioned in our discipline. The board, in some regards, is the final court of appeal in many ways. While the board is often less emotionally involved there is still an advantage. Care must still be taken to see the full picture and to allow matters to work

to the surface so that the matters can be understood. Sometimes the courts of the land may take more care than some churches do. Did you ever think of that? We can learn from that. It is important that care is taken so that proper policies are safeguarded, and the right courses are charted.

The board is not an absolute authority in itself. There are other levels of authority that must be regarded in the solution and need to be respected in the various working out of issues. There are times when decisions do need to be made that are not very popular. There are church policies and precedents that must be kept in focus in problem solving. Sometimes this seems like a very inefficient approach but it can be the very thing that safeguards us, is it not? Therefore, it is part of the functioning of a bishop board that is a safeguard and is a help for the church.

Possibly there are other areas that could be enlarged on. Nonetheless, this approach that our group has taken has been an approach that the groups before us have taken. It has been a blessing and we want to be willing to pay the price to continue to embrace this approach for the welfare and the blessing of the church.

lights to shine. They are willing to be counted members of the church; but the church must not expect anything from them. Talk about their weakness in business or social lines, and you insult them. Talk about their weakness in religious work, and they will allow the criticism to pass without a protest. The church must not interfere with their business or their pleasures or their filthy and sinful habits or any other pet sin. If the church insists on demanding anything from them, they will seek a church where they can have more “liberty.”

Poor, deluded souls! They imagine they can hide their light under a bushel; and that just before they are ready to die, they will take the bushel off; but the fact is, there is no light there; and when the final summons comes to meet the Bridegroom, they will find, like the foolish virgins, that not only the light, but even the oil is gone. Christ says, “If any man will not deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me daily, he is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 16:24; 10:38; Luke 9:23).

2. Some people, not satisfied to let the life of God shine through them, strive to *make* their lights shine. Like the John Brown of our illustration, and like the Pharisees of old, they

love to sound a trumpet before them. Their chief ambition seems to be to convince the world that they are Christians, and Christians who are worthy of occupying the uppermost seats in the synagogues. Some are conscientious in their endeavors to force their “admirable qualities” upon the notice of the public, while others strive to send out a light for the revenue it brings.

3. After all, the wisest thing to do is to take our Saviour at His word, and simply *let* our lights shine. God has a work for each of us. Let Him have His way; and He will place us in the positions He wishes to occupy and where we can be of the greatest possible service to Him. These positions may not suit us; but why should we seek to interfere with God’s work. Be willing to lead a life for God wherever you are. Take God at His word, follow His teachings, and He will take care of results. Are you questioned concerning the tenets of your faith, explain them the best you can. Don’t be afraid to let people know where you stand upon any question upon which you have a position. Let people know what you think about temperance, virtue, repentance, conversion, sanctification, pride, covetousness, or any other question on which intelligent people should

inform themselves. And then don't make the mistake of telling other people what they ought to do when you yourself do not heed your own teaching. God judges many people by the words of their own mouths. Don't be afraid to testify against the known sins of your own neighborhood. What if you are called a fanatic? The world owes its progress to those who were considered fanatics. Better be right with God and wrong with the world than right with the world and wrong with God. As light

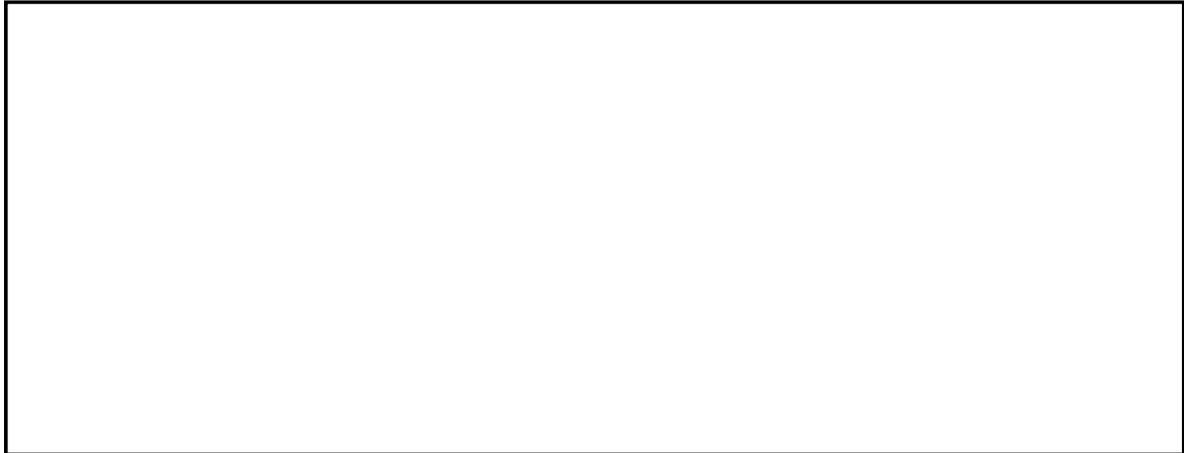
shines more brightly when surrounded with darkness, so the Christian character stands out in boldest relief when in the midst of opposition and persecution. The cause of Christ has been made to suffer much because professed Christians have chosen to sacrifice truth for the sake of popularity. One soul, firmly rooted and grounded upon the Rock, with the courage to stand for God and His word, at all times and under all circumstances, is worth more to the cause of Christ than a thousand half-hearted professors.

A
Treatise
On
Outward
Water-Baptism
By Bishop Peter Burkholder
1882

Keys to the Word
The Bible Book by Book
Or, Helps to Bible Study

by A.T. Pierson

The Pulpit Exchange



Catalogue

Sermons transcribed and available on various topics.

Volumes 1 – 9 available.

Back Issues Available

Ministry Topics

Special Meetings Available

Book Reprints are available

- 100 Lessons in Bible Study
- A Talk With Church Members
- Bible Wines: Laws of

Fermentation

- Christian Attire
- Christianity and Dress
- Christ, The Apostles and Wine
- Dress: A Brief Treatise
- The Ideal Christian Home
- The Ministry
- The Temperate Life
- Wordly Conformity in Dress

New Series:

Practical Nonconformity

Vol 1 — The Christian, Cards, Contests, Games, and Other Amusements.

Others Currently in Progress:

10 Commandments
Exposition of Colossians
Exposition of the Gospel of John
Nonresistance Meetings
Writer's Meetings
Literature Evangelism
Various Fellowship Meetings
Garden City Confession of Faith

Full Catalogue available