

# **WHEN ELDERS CAN'T LEAD**

**James W. Garrett**

## **SECTION I: A Dysfunctional Eldership**

- **Root Causes of Dysfunction: Trust Factors**
- **Corrective Measures**
- **When All Else Fails**

## **SECTION II: When the Congregation Rejects the Elders' Leadership**

- **Proper Action When Church Members Consider the Leaders to be Guilty of Malfeasance; Is it a sin to lodge a complaint?**
  - 1. Accusations Against Individual Elders**
  - 2. Accusations Against the entire Elders Council**
- **If All Else Fails**

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New American Standard Bible ®  
© Copyright the Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977.  
Used by permission

© Copyright 1996 Doulos Press, Tulsa, Oklahoma. This article is copyrighted in order to protect against improper use of the material contained therein. Permission is hereby granted to anyone wishing to make copies for free distribution.



# **WHEN ELDERS CAN'T LEAD**

**James W. Garrett**

Sooner or later, every council of elders will face situations that make functioning difficult. Such inability falls into two broad categories:

1. There is a problem in the council itself, resulting in a dysfunctional eldership;
2. There is a problem between the council and the congregation (or a portion of it) to the degree that the congregation rejects the leadership of the elders.

Within these two broad categories there are a number of subsets. In this paper, we will discuss some of the functional problems, their origin, and possible solutions.

## **SECTION I A DYSFUNCTIONAL ELDERSHIP**

### **ROOT CAUSES OF DYSFUNCTION**

Before a council of elders can function effectively, a genuine relationship of trust must exist. This trust must be present in the following areas (this list is based on personal experience and observation, rather than a list codified in Scripture):

1. Trust in the fact that God has chosen each elder to be a part of the council (no one is there by the will of man);
2. Trust in the efficacy of the cross in each elder's life (only broken men can be trusted with authority).
3. Trust in the honesty and openness of one's fellow elders (no suspicion of hidden agendas);
4. Trust in the bond that make's the elders one (for better, for worse, in sickness, and in health...);
5. Trust in the commitment one to the other (being one another's defenders, rather than one another's detractors);
6. Trust in the grace gifts of one's fellow elders (relying on the exercise of those gifts in the council);
7. Trust in the fact that the foundation of each elder's life is Jesus Christ, rather than one's role, function, or position in the church;
8. Trust in the commitment of each elder to carry his part of the work load.

It has been my experience that if any of these areas of trust are absent, the council of elders probably will face rough sledding in its efforts to function effectively. Of course, one would be foolish to trust in these things if they weren't actually true. If any of these elements are absent

from an elder's life, the ultimate result will be some degree of dysfunction in the council. Before we talk about solutions to problems, we will elaborate on each of these points.

**TRUST IN THE FACT THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN  
EACH ELDER TO BE A PART OF THE COUNCIL  
(NO ONE IS THERE BY THE WILL OF MAN)**

One of the greatest challenges to the church is determining whom God has chosen for the eldership. In other studies, we have examined the Scriptures that make it clear that men are made elders by the Holy Spirit, not by human choice.<sup>1</sup> We will not take the time to review those Scriptures.

I cannot agree with the paradigm (put forth by some of my dearest and most respected friends), that sees men moving from faithful church membership, to faithful deacons, to faithful small group leaders, to faithful elders, to faithful financially supported elders, to faithful trans-local ministry. Indeed, this is the progression that God may choose for a specific individual. However, it is not appropriate for the church to hold the view that there is an ascending spiritual career track that culminates in trans-local ministry.

I have several problems with this paradigm. One is that it elevates one ministry above another. A faithful deacon who is caring for widows is not doing anything of lower worth than an elder who is contemplating deep decisions relating to the church. I know that some who use this paradigm would not view it as presenting an ascending hierarchy, but would view it as a pattern to follow in enlarging an individual's responsibility. Even so, most who consider this paradigm would be hard pressed to avoid thinking in terms of an ascending hierarchy.

Another problem that I have with this paradigm is that it has a propensity for stimulating ambition. If there is an ascending spiritual career track, then those who are at one level will tend to be ambitious to move up the scale. The godly attitude is to serve faithfully where one is, without thought of "advancement." We have witnessed great sorrow in many churches, caused by ambitious men who have striven to climb the ladder and become elders. Any man who craves "eldership" is automatically disqualified, in my opinion.

Further, there is a problem with the idea that elders supported by the church are in some way a notch above those who are self-supporting. This is not the case, at all. Some men may be called to be self-supporting all of their lives as a model to men of the church. Some, like Paul, may move from one mode to the other. Others appropriately may be supported by the church very early in their lives. Every elder should be self supporting unless the church says, "We need the gifts resident in you freed up for fuller service. If you will quit your job, we will support you."

Some men may be equipped and chosen to be deacons all of their lives. On the other hand, some elders would make horrible deacons, especially in those churches where deacons are called upon to deal with practical matters.

So, back to our original premise, it is important to know that God has inserted each elder into that role. Only when this is a conviction can the elders trust one another at this point.

**TRUST IN THE EFFICACY OF THE CROSS IN EACH ELDER'S LIFE  
(ONLY BROKEN MEN CAN BE TRUSTED WITH AUTHORITY)**

Experience has shown that only broken men can handle spiritual authority without harm to themselves and pain to the congregation. As a general principle, it can be stated that the more significant God's plans are for a leader, the more years that God will keep that man in a time of preparation. There is much in the Bible to give credence to this statement. Most biblical cases in which God took decades to prepare a person for ministry, were years in which the future leader was "broken." Abram, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, David, Paul, and many other such men come to mind. This is one reason why leaders are "elders," rather than gifted young leaders.

When an elder is convinced that each of his fellow elders has been broken by God, he is inclined to trust that elder's decisions as coming from God, not from human or fleshly motives.

**TRUST IN THE HONESTY AND OPENNESS  
OF ONE'S FELLOW ELDERS  
(NO SUSPICION OF HIDDEN AGENDAS)**

"What you see is what you get," Flip Wilson's Geraldine was wont to say. Such should be the case among the elders. It is important for each man to be totally honest with his fellows, concerning his anxieties, his opinions, his preferences, and his biases. Especially destructive is the situation in which elders represent various constituencies in the church and play some sort of political game within the council. I have been a part of elders councils in which this "House of Representatives" mentality existed. SHEER HORROR!!!

Another similar problem is present when an elder has some sort of an agenda. I believe that all men with agendas, however good and apparently holy, are a danger to the church. The only agenda appropriate for elders is to grow in one's ability to hear from God and obey, once God has spoken.

**TRUST IN THE BOND THAT MAKES THE ELDERS ONE  
(FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE, IN SICKNESS, AND IN HEALTH...)**

Each elder must know that his fellow elders are there for the long-haul. No one will bail out in time of trouble, or leave the eldership for any reason, unless God calls him to something else, and the call is confirmed by his fellow elders.

The bond between elders must be strong enough to bear the test of disagreement. The KJV rendering of Amos 3:3, *Can two walk together, except they be agreed*, has caused a serious misunderstanding of the subject of "agreement."

Following the KJV's rendering of this verse, church leaders have concluded that unless we are in agreement with one another, we cannot serve together. This is not what Amos 3:3 says. Such an understanding of the is a rather oblique contradiction of the meaning of this passage.

**Amos 3:1-8 is a "cause and effect" rhetorical passage, explaining the prophet's compulsion to prophesy. Note the following pattern in God's argument presented herein:**

CAUSE	EFFECT
When he has prey	a lion roars in the forest
If he has taken something	a young lion cries out of his den
Where there is bait for him	a bird falls into a trap upon the earth
When it captures something	a snare springs up from the earth
When a trumpet is blown in the city	the people are afraid
When the Lord has done it	a calamity occurs in the city
Because a lion has roared	everyone fears
The Lord has spoken	prophecy comes forth

**Notice that this cause and effect argument was begun with:**

Unless two men have agreed (to walk together)	they do not walk together
---	---------------------------

**The sense of Amos 3:3 is that two men walked together because they had an agreement, or an appointment, to do so. Here is Amos 3:3 in more recent Bible versions:**

MOFFATT	Do two men travel together unless they have planned it?
RSV	Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?
NAS	Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?
NIV	Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?

The NKJV retains language similar to the KJV, but it is adjusted to convey the correct meaning, "Can two walk together unless they are agreed?" Note: "agreed," not "be agreed" or "in agreement."

Any responsible exegesis of this passage must recognize that Amos 3:3 is not making a statement of truth, it is a part of a logical argument (because God has spoken, prophets are compelled to speak), as an attorney would use in court. The sense of the statement, used in the argument, is that two men walk together because they agreed to do so. Even if one wants to make Amos 3:3 a spiritual principle, the principle would be, *Two men can't walk together unless they have agreed to walk together, and if so agreed, will do so whether they are in agreement or not.*

Thus, this verse which often has been used as a reason to part company with other believers, should be used in just the opposite way, a reason to stay together, *We have agreed to walk together.*

Another important point under this heading is the matter of unity. It is interesting to note that all of the passages in the New Testament epistles that plea for unity occur in the context of spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit realizes that differing gifts cause people to see things from different perspectives, and even to cause some abrasiveness in the style of ministry. The plea is that all of these ministries come from the same Spirit and should not be occasions for division.

### **TRUST IN THE COMMITMENT TO ONE ANOTHER (PROMOTING INSTEAD OF DETRACTING)**

Satan always will try to entice elders by flattery. He also is very adept at bringing to an elder people who will seek to gain status by putting down the other elders, while flattering the elder to whom they are talking. Any elder worth his salt will recognize this satanic ploy and rebuke it.

A few years ago, while assisting an elder council that was dysfunctional, I realized that the men had not made a real commitment to one another. Each man was focused on "my ministry." I posed the question to them, "If the five of you were in a boat on a lake and a storm arose, and it became apparent that the boat had sufficient buoyancy to carry four men to shore, but not five, would you be willing to get out of the boat, facing probable death, in order to allow your fellow elders to survive?" There was silence. Then one man said, "Whew! I don't know that I could do that." I then said, "Unless all of you can say, *yes*, to that question, then this eldership will not survive." Indeed, it did not survive, and the church went under, within a couple of years.

### **TRUST IN THE GRACE GIFTS OF ONE'S FELLOW ELDERS (RELYING ON THE EXERCISE OF THOSE GIFTS IN THE COUNCIL)**

One problem that exists in some councils is the distrust of the functional gifts of fellow elders. For example, if one elder has a proven track record of prophetic insight, the other elders should

function in trust of that insight. If one elder has proven often to be right when he says, "I think that this is a bad idea," then the other elders should learn to trust that discernment.

It often is difficult, especially for young, developing elders, to trust in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, resident in the council, rather than relying on human reason.

### **TRUST IN THE FACT THAT EACH ELDER'S IDENTITY IS BASED UPON HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST, RATHER THAN HIS ROLE, FUNCTION, OR POSITION IN THE CHURCH**

Whenever a leader's foundational identity is his role in the church, problems are waiting to happen. This condition frequently arises when one's *calling* becomes viewed as such a sacred thing that it cannot be put down. The calling becomes one's identity in Christ, rather than one's relationship with Christ.

For example, if the elders council should conclude that a particular elder should lay down his ministry and focus on family issues, and this elder finds it very difficult to do so because of his *calling*, this in itself reveals a potential problem.

In this arena also is the mistaken view that *gifting* and *calling* should make room for someone. Proverbs 18:16 often is quoted,

*A man's gift makes room for him,  
And brings him before great men.*

Two comments must be made on the manner in which this verse usually is applied. First, this verse has nothing to do with spiritual, intellectual, or any other personal graces. The reference is to the generous gift that someone brings to the king or other personage when he comes to visit. This gift for the host gains him entrance into the host's presence. The sense of the verse is closer to the idea of a man's being advanced into leadership because he is a generous contributor of money, than one who is put forward because he is prolific in charismatic gifts.

Secondly, this verse is not making the statement that it is appropriate to make room for one who brings gifts. It is just stating a fact, not making a statement of approval. Because of these two exegetical facts, the manner in which this verse has been used by Charismatics is in error.

The main issue of leadership is character. A man's character should cause him to be considered for leadership, not *gifts*. Those who are advanced because of gifts, invariably encounter problems and usually become problems to the church.

### **TRUST IN THE COMMITMENT OF EACH ELDER TO CARRY HIS PART OF THE WORK LOAD**

When the task is there to be done, whatever that task might be, each elder must put his hand to the plow. This does not mean that every elder will do the same amount of work on every project. Some elders are stronger in some areas and in those areas it is only appropriate that they carry more of the work load than those who are weak in those areas. However, there must no be a slacker among the elders. When there is a slacker, Satan has a great opportunity stir resentment.

It is important for elders to meet at least weekly. How can elders function together if they are not meeting together to pray and share in the decisions that effect the church, as well as participate in the ministry of the church. In many elderships, the church staff (secretaries, youth ministers, etc.) run the church because elders are too busy to meet and give oversight. It is easier to pay someone to do the work and then meet every so often to criticize the staff. Unfortunately, I have been involved with elderships that have done just that.

### **CORRECTIVE MEASURES**

So, what is an elder council to do when it finds itself dysfunctional, when one or more of the above areas is out of adjustment? The first thing that must be done is for the elders to get on their faces before God and confess their sins. Some sort of sin usually is present when elders are dysfunctional. Often, the sin is an expression of character flaws. Rarely are their bad people involved in a dysfunctional eldership, only very human people whose imperfection is manifesting itself. A dysfunctional eldership should enter a time of fasting, get out of town together and spend hours in prayer, repenting, interceding, asking God to reveal hearts. The Bride of Christ, the local expression of the Church purchased by the blood of Christ Jesus, is at stake. No price is too great to pay in order to preserve the beauty and holiness of the Bride.

At this stage, elders should not discuss their problems with members of the church. Usually, it also is a mistake to air these problems with the elders' wives. Most wives are defenders of their mates and quickly view their husband's opposition as "the enemy." The elder's wife then has to deal with negative feelings and her own personal struggles to forgive those whom she sees as her husband's opposition. Why would any grown man want to so wound his dear wife? Unfortunately, many men are little boys more than they are men and selfishly turn to their wives for comfort, instead of turning to God for guidance, comfort, and correction.

It is appropriate to contact other elder councils whom the troubled council trusts, asking them to pray for a solution. The elder council contacted for prayer should be pledged to confidentiality (any elder who cannot keep a confidence is disqualified as an elder).

If a serious effort to resolve the problem through prayer and fasting fails to bring resolution, then trans-local input is called for. There are various types of trans-local input. In those churches that are a part of a denomination, the denomination usually has a structure in place to deal with the problem. Another type of trans-local involvement frequently implemented in some movements is that of an elders council from a sister church.

Increasingly, God seems to be raising up apostolic ministry that can give input into troubled elderships. Such apostolic input seems to be most effective when it comes from an apostolic team, rather than an individual apostle. The team must be composed of men trusted by the elders council and the council must give the team the freedom to deal with all pertinent issues.

Because trans-local involvement in a troubled eldership always is a painful experience, it is important that there be a relationship of trust already in place between the trans-local team and the elders.<sup>2</sup>

Some independent churches have begun forming "fellowships" in the last decade. These are organizations in which the individual churches are autonomous, but there is an accountability to the fellowship that exists. This, for example, is the structure that the Southern Baptists have had from the denomination's inception. The Southern Baptist Convention is a fellowship of autonomous churches. Each council of elders must examine its own conscience about whether or not to be a part of such a fellowship.

Some have suggested that we form a "Fellowship of Conclave Churches." Personally, I am committed to the conclave's always being no more than a meeting where we come together from our various backgrounds to discuss New Testament Church matters and the practical application of data in the contemporary church. In the process, I pray that we will develop deep relationships with one another, spiritually, but not organizationally. In my view the Conclave ever should become an organization of churches.

My own preference is to avoid extra-local memberships for the local church. There are several reasons why I would not choose to join churches together in some sort of organization. First, I have seen many such organizations over the more than sixty years that I have been in church leadership, and I have not seen any of these that have avoided a "we and them" mentality. Those in the fellowship have particular distinctives that set them apart from other churches. They become defined and identified by two things: (1) the distinctives that brought the organization into being; (2) membership in the organization (they become "XXX churches"). I want to be a Christian, and that's all. I refuse to be a "Charismatic Christian," a "New Testament Christian," an "Evangelical Christian," etc. I am a Christian, and I refuse any definitive label that may set me apart from other believers. If I must have a label, it is, "a slave of Jesus Christ."

Another reason why I would tend to avoid such organizations is the problem that arises when the organization takes a path that conflicts with the views held in the local church. The most extreme current examples are those denominations and conventions that are debating issues such as ordination of homosexuals, women in church government, abortion, etc. The local church then has to go along with the decisions of the group or go through the painful experience of withdrawing membership. Equally as painful, though not as newsworthy, are issues dealing with such things as "baptism in the Holy Spirit," spiritual gifts, phenomena and manifestations. Some of us, for example, became *persona non grata* in our historic fellowships in the 1970's, when we broadened our pneumatology.

A third reason that I would not be comfortable in such an organization is its unbiblical nature. I do not see biblical authority for any extra-congregational organization which churches can join and from which they can be dismissed because of not meeting the fellowship's criteria.

Even so, each church must make its own decision on these matters and we must not judge one another on this issue. This is one of those things that fall in the realm of opinion and each believer should be free to have his own opinion without it's effecting relationships. I have expressed my opinion here and trust that my doing so will not effect my intimate relationship with those of you who disagree with me.

It is important that there be relationships that can be counted on in time of trouble, whether those be through membership in a fellowship or through spiritual relationships with other churches and apostolic ministries.

### **WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS...**

If the situation has reached the point that trans-local input is required, it is quite obvious that problems are very serious. That being true, the trans-local ministry involved should be given plenary authority. This may mean removal of an elder, or even the dissolution of the elders council. It is possible that the council consists of men who became elders at the instigation of man, rather than by choice of God. If that proves to be the case, then the council should be dissolved and a Timothy or a Titus (an apostolic delegate) should move into the community to lead the church until a functioning elders council is raised up. Perhaps even an apostle may move into the community to lead during this season.

It is important that the apostolic role be defined for the congregation. This is not a "pastor" who is coming in to run the show, but apostolic ministry to come and discern the Mind of God for church leadership. If the problems have reached the level requiring the tenure of an apostolic delegate, obviously the congregation no longer lives in ignorance of the problems. By now, some members probably have left the church. With the dissolution of the elders council, some others also probably will leave. Unfortunately, there seems to be no way that this can be avoided.

If the apostolic ministry is undertaken by an apostolic delegate, in the absence of other elders, it is important that the delegate be accountable to the apostle or apostles who assigned him. If the apostolic ministry is undertaken by an apostle, it is important that the apostle be accountable to the elders of his home church or an apostolic team of trans-local ministers with whom he has a relationship. Both probably are healthiest, the home church caring about the spiritual health of the apostle, the apostolic team being concerned with his ministry in the troubled church.

There are some instances in which men who truly are elders have never learned to function. In that case, a Timothy may move into the community and mentor the elders into effective ministry. This seems to be the type of ministry that Paul delegated to Timothy at Ephesus. There already was an eldership at Ephesus when Paul assigned Timothy to the Ephesian Church. Timothy's

role was to instruct the eldership and to ordain additional elders for the rapidly growing congregation. In such a case, the apostle or apostolic delegate will be accountable to the elders whom he is mentoring, as well as some accountability to the apostle who assigned him. One reason that his primary accountability will be to the elders whom he is mentoring is that these men must be trained to bear such responsibility, rather than looking to some father-figure who is extra-local.

The apostle or apostolic delegate may become a permanent member of the church that he has come to help. This usually is a bit of a problem, because it is difficult for the other elders to view him as "just one of the boys" (this is the same problem faced by one who plants a church and wants a true eldership to function). However, if his spirit is right and it is God's will for this to become his "home church," it will be a blessing.

## **SECTION II**

### **WHEN THE CONGREGATION REJECTS THE ELDERS' LEADERSHIP**

A huge array of possibilities exist in this arena. For example, the congregation may reject the elders (or some of the elders) because of heavy handed authority and spiritual abuse; or, the elders may be a bunch of hypocrites and one day the congregation finally wakes up and cries, "FOUL!!!" On the other hand, the problem may be in the congregation itself. Whatever the human elements may be, one can be certain that Satan is behind it all.

### **WHAT SHOULD CHURCH MEMBERS DO WHEN THEY CONSIDER ELDERS TO BE GUILTY OF MALFEASANCE; IS IT A SIN TO BRING A COMPLAINT?**

Unfortunately, a lot of misconduct has been tolerated among leaders because of the misdirected teaching that God will disapprove of *touching God's anointed*. This expression comes from 1 Samuel 26, in which David had an opportunity to slay Saul. God already had chosen David to replace Saul; Samuel, prophet and priest of Jehovah, had anointed David as king quite some time before the episode recorded in 1 Samuel 26. Even so, Saul still was viewed by David as God's anointed, even as he, David also was God's anointed. David said that he refrained from taking advantage of the opportunity because it was wrong to *stretch our one's hand against the Lord's anointed* (see verses 9, 11, 16, 23).

The English form of the Hebrew term used here is *Messiah*. The Greek form of the term is *Christos*, or, *Christ* (the term used in the Septuagint in 1 Samuel 26). Who is the *Messiah* or the *Christ*? Certainly, not any elder of a church. The kings and priests of Israel were pre-figures of God's eternal Messiah, whom we know as Jesus, the Messiah. To put any elder into that role or definition is sin. So, forget about being hesitant to "touch God's anointed," if the party involved is someone other than Jesus.

There is an appropriate caution, however, about bringing charges against elders. Paul wrote to his delegate, Timothy, during his time of bringing order to the church at Ephesus,

*Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19)*

Paul was acknowledging that there always will be people who have a problem with leadership. A segment of the church seems to relish "roast preacher" for Sunday dinner.

### **ACCUSATIONS MADE AGAINST INDIVIDUAL ELDERS**

As noted above, accusations against elders should not be allowed unless there are witnesses to some sort of malfeasance or malpractice. Hearsay and rumor are not allowed. There must be witnesses (plural) before an examination is to be conducted. In the examination, there must be no bias or preferential treatment given to the elder in question. Truth must reign, in an atmosphere of love.

Note that the instructions in 1 Timothy 5, concerning aberrant elders are given to an apostolic delegate, a trans-local entity. Timothy seemed to be the man with authority in Ephesus, rather than the authority's resting solely with an elder council. This, of course, was because of the apostolic role that he was exercising during the formative period of the church.

If a fully functioning elders council is in place, and charges are brought against an elder, then the elders council probably should look to handling the matter, initially. However, because suspicion of preferential treatment probably will taint the process, it may be best to bring in apostolic help. If there seems to be any substance to the charges brought by plural witnesses, a "change of venue" may be wise.

### **ACCUSATIONS MADE AGAINST THE ENTIRE ELDERSHIP**

This is a horribly difficult situation and no general rule can be given. We could spend the entire conclave discussing all of the possibilities. Here, we can touch upon only a few. In many instances, some version of the Matthew 18:15-17 pattern is appropriate. In other instances, because of the elements involved, this pattern is not appropriate.

In denominational churches, there is a clear *modus operandi*. Most denominations have a Committee on Ministry, which is charged with handling such problems. These denominations have a clergy mentality, of course. One study conducted a few years ago revealed that these denominational committees usually sided with the church and solved the problem by moving the minister to another location. In churches with an eldership, this is a more complex situation. First, every elder council should be willing to hear people who have disagreements. This is one of the qualifications for individual elders.<sup>5</sup> We would assume, therefore, that such also would apply to an elder council.

Some churches have by-laws that spell out how a congregation can bring the elders to task. In such a situation, that procedure must be followed and so the present discussion is irrelevant for those churches.

If dialogue does not resolve the issue, then further steps must be taken, hopefully by the elders themselves. When the elders realize that the congregation has lost respect for them, this again is a time for fasting and prayer. First, the elders themselves should get away for prayer and fasting. Such an action often undoes something in the heavenlies and the problem is resolved.

If prayer fasting by the elders does not bring resolution, then the entire church should be called to fasting and prayer, with corporate prayer meetings being held. These should not be meetings in which people come together to talk, give "words," or exhortations. These should be meetings in which people come together to PRAY. There must be an atmosphere of self-abnegation and sorrow over the sad state of affairs. The attitude must be, "God, we are going to keep this up until You bring resolution." After a time, words may be appropriate in the prayer meeting, but initially such words are a distraction from the work that needs to be done in prayer.

I have been involved in several situations in which a segment of the church has rejected leadership. I have seen a peaceful resolution to the problem every time this plan has been followed. I have seen a painful resolution when it has not been followed - even to the point of law suits.

The resolution may be that certain individuals leave the church, peacefully, because they cannot follow the direction that the elders are taking the church. Such is not always a negative event. God may be calling those who depart to a different vision than that to which he has called the church from whence they go.

Usually, trans-local involvement would be a mistake when there is a longstanding functioning elders council that is being rejected by some in the church. Often, this scenario develops when some in the church want to change the church - in essence, "have their way." Sometimes this situation occurs when young men are outgrowing their "fathers" in the church. When this is true, the elders must stand their ground; they are God's installed leadership in that church. They must not hedge on this. Trans-local involvement could imply that who leads the church is negotiable. This message must not be communicated. For that matter, those in the church who want to make the church fit their preferences probably would reject any trans-local ministry that did not agree with them. So, this sort of situation must remain in the elders hands, at least through this stage of process.

Those members who have been challenging the elders and who cannot lay down their point of view, should leave the church, peacefully. What if they won't leave the church and continue to be seditious? At this point, they must be confronted (Titus 3:10-11) by the elders. In our litigious society, the elders may face a possible law suit by these people, but the risk must be taken. Because the elders could appear to be defending themselves and protecting their "kingdom," apostolic involvement may be a help in the confrontation.

## IF ALL ELSE FAILS

Once again we come to the "last ditch" scenario. The elders have prayed. They have called the church to prayer and fasting. A sizeable segment of the church still is in opposition and "church" becomes another word for "pain." The only resort left is apostolic involvement. This may not solve anything, but because the Bride of Christ is involved, this step should be taken. Surprisingly, because apostolic ministry carries an indefinable spiritual authority, even dissidents often respect that authority.

Such apostolic involvement is most effective when apostolic ministry has been courted over the years. The congregation and the elders trust the trans-local ministers because they have a history with them. Trans-local ministry that does not have a history, either with the church or with the leadership, usually has no business being involved in a church's problems. Relationships are everything. The current trend to call in "church consultants" who are professionals in consulting is far different from the biblical pattern of trans-local ministers who are a part of the history of the local church.

Paul wrote of the constant "burden" that he bore for the churches. Only one who in his spirit bears such a burden for a church, has a right to be involved with that church in its time of trouble.

---

<sup>1</sup> James Garrett, *New Testament Church Leadership* (Tulsa, Oklahoma, Doulos Press, 1996) page 135ff

<sup>2</sup> See our paper, *How New Testament Churches Relate to One Another*

<sup>3</sup> 1 Timothy 3:3 *Gentle* (Greek- Επεικής), meaning, *one who is reasonable and equitable*, (one with whom we can disagree, talk things over, and come to a fair conclusion).