

AN ELDER MUST RULE HIS HOUSE WELL

1Timothy 3:4 (KJV), “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.”

The Greek word for “rule” is “to stand in rank and preside over”. The elder must be blameless in the rulership of his home. This encompasses his relationship with his wife, his children's conduct and his finances. The fact is that if he does not know how to rule his own home, he will not be able to rule the church which is presented here as a much larger family. 1 Timothy 3:5 adds, “(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)” Using the first class condition in verse 5, the apostle Paul made this a very real and visible condition to evaluate an elder. Look at the manner in which he takes care of his household. This will reveal his ability or the lack of it to take care of the church. The lack of ability to care for a home of a few individuals reveals his inability to take care of the house of God that could number in the hundreds. If he is not faithful in the least, how could he be faithful in the much?! This revelation and comparison cannot be denied or ignored. If any church rejects this comparative quality and does not want to take this very visible qualification for eldership into their equation, the church will certainly suffer.

We live in an age of broken homes. The dereliction of parents in the bringing up of children litters the landscape of our time, worldwide. The saddest part is that no concrete steps have been taken to reverse this failure. A brief survey of Christendom paints a not too different picture. Broken homes and bankrupt parents addicted to vices such as gambling and drinking are found inside and outside churches. People have become so used to such scenes that they have accepted this as a natural course in family life. The choice of “pastors and elders” is done by scraping from the bottom of the barrel, family life being conveniently ignored in the process of assessing their qualifications. Seniority, wealth, carnal status in society, friendship and flattery – these have replaced the God-given qualifications simply because the church “needs” leaders! Pragmatism has destroyed many churches. The slide must stop if the church is to survive until the LORD returns. Leaders who cannot rule their own homes must be disqualified from the service of an elder. This is not a negotiable quality!

I have seen pastors and elders who are afraid of their wives. These elders allow their wives to rule the church by proxy. Their wives’ comments and opinions cause them to refrain from doing what is right in God’s sight. Harkening to their wives’ desires takes priority over pleasing God. These leaders would not dare to do anything if their wives have not been consulted first. The decisions they make at BOE meetings can be switched around if their wives disapprove of their decisions. Such elders may possess a good knowledge of the Bible and all the other qualifications of an elder but if they are afraid of their wives, then they are to be rejected. Loving the wife unconditionally and sacrificially **IN THE LORD**, i.e. as Christ loved His church and died for the church, is not the same as loving the wife because of the fear of her ire and displeasure. More women today are well educated and financially independent. This “liberated women” worldly concept has sadly crept into many churches. They speak out during public meetings and the husbands sheepishly sit and allow their wives to be the spokesman when it is supposed to be the other way round. Such behaviour has brought open shame to the husbands especially when they become argumentative, shout and

lose control. **1 Corinthians 14:34-35** (KJV), "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law. **35** And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." **1 Timothy 2:11-15** (KJV), "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. **12** But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. **13** For Adam was first formed, then Eve. **14** And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. **15** Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." Husbands who are not able to take care of their wives are also husbands who do not know and obey God's Word. Some might know the Word in their heads; but sadly not in their hearts which is obedience. They have not been taking care of their wives' spiritual life throughout their marriage and this is the sad result.

Another sad state of affairs in the home is the ill-disciplined children. When elders fail to discipline their own children, be assured these elders will not do any better when it comes to church discipline! The Book of Titus teaches it very clearly. Titus 1:6, "If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly..." These men are supposed to be believers and to have been teaching their children from birth; and when their children's behaviour is one of carnality, i.e. they are lovers of the world, it speaks a lot about their focus in their family life. God's promise to all obedient Christian parents is in **Proverbs 22:6** (KJV), "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Their children must exhibit Christian behaviour and conduct. If they are truly born again, they will show forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They must not be accused of unruly behaviour (behaviour not put under obedience), of riot (i.e. like an unsaved person), of having no regard for God and His Holy Word, even of disregarding the Word of God entirely. When bad public behaviour is visible, it is because of the head of the home's failure to discipline at home from the infant years. Without the exercise of godly discipline the church leader shouts like a toothless tiger. He roars and roars at the top of his voice about biblical separation from sin and wrong doctrines and the need to live a holy life and all sorts of virtuous biblical platitudes; but it is like thunder and lightning without rain. The elder who does not discipline his children according to Scriptures must be set aside. He has failed his children and he will surely fail God's children.

Last, but not least, we look into how the elder governs his finances. An elder is not to be tightfisted with his own money. He should not think that his money is his own and not entirely God's. How an elder handles his personal finances will most likely be the same way he handles the finances in the church. Does he know and truly believe that whatever money he has is actually God's money? He is not at liberty to do whatever he wants with it. If all he does is to spend it on things he needs and worldly things, and he does not use it to buy good Christian books to read, and he does not give to missions, and if he possesses a tightfisted miserly regard for money, then he will not handle the church's money wisely. If he believes the best and wisest way to govern his own finances is to put the money in the bank and build reserves, he will do the same with the tithes and offerings in the church. His trust is in the bank and not in God. Missions and missionaries will also suffer lack because of him.

Conversely, an elder who truly believes that God has given and blessed him with whatever finances he has, and who uses them wisely for the promotion of God's servants and kingdom, will have the same regard for the church finances. The key thing to remember is that all finances belong to God. Money is to be used and must be used wisely. It is not meant to be stored in the bank solely to build reserves, like the servant who buries his talent in the sand! What kind of books do Christians buy and have on their book shelves? Are they mostly books like Bible encyclopedias, Bible dictionaries, biographies of godly men and women, or mostly worldly books (e.g. "how to make my millions before I turn 30"; business, sports, fashion, etc.)? What occupies our conversation? Do we talk about stocks and shares and property prices or the next car to buy or other worldly pursuits? How an elder spends the money God has given him will reveal a lot about how he will spend the God-given finances in the church.

To rule one's house in a godly manner is one of life's most difficult challenges. An elder must have his house in godly order whereby sins are biblically dealt with and repentance prayerfully accepted and children's spiritual lives are given the highest importance. His children are to be brought up from infancy in the fear and admonition of God. His wife is to be loved in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it. The elder does not fear his wife. His finances are used to promote God's kingdom and support God's servants. He who does not meet this practical and visible qualification of ruling his own house well cannot be God's elder! Many churches have ignored this qualification and have paid a heavy price! Having carnal elders in the leadership is the quickest way to kill a church.