

Defender



“I am set for the defense of the gospel”

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Re-evaluating “Reaffirmation”

Gary W. Summers

Everyone anticipates the first day of the Open Forum at Freed-Hardeman’s Annual Lectures, wondering what topics will surface. The second question under consideration (February 3, 2002) contained a brief treatment of “the reaffirmation of elders.” Ralph Gilmore’s remarks are put in quote format [double-indented with smaller font]; our comments are interspersed.

Is the recent custom of reaffirming elders—Is this somehow or another Scriptural, the question goes? And then 1 Timothy 5, verses 17-20, talks about the fact that we should give honor to those brethren who are worthy of honor—even double honor—especially to those who work hard at teaching and preaching. Notice the verse where there is *presbuteros*, and in verse one it seems to have in mind the fact that the younger folks should, you know, appreciate the older folks, and that’s encouraging to me. “You should not bring an accusation against an older man,” New American Standard says. So the word *presbuteros*, I think, in verse one is talking about older people, that you should respect older people. But then, when it gets down to verse seventeen, I think he’s talking about elders, because these are those who rule over you, and that would not be true of all people. That would be true of the elders.

Certainly, all of this is true, and if someone had asked about the word usage of *presbuteros* in verses 1 and 17, it would even be relevant, but the question has to do with whether or not elders should be reaffirmed.

Now the question then is, “Is it possible for there to be a reaffirmation, or should elders be reconfirmed after so many years?” Okay. This is certainly in the area of speculation, but I’ll tell you what I think.

Wait a minute! Why is this subject in the area of

speculation? Either the Bible authorizes the practice, or it does not. Is it commanded? No. Is there an example of reaffirmation? No. Is there an implication that the eldership as a whole should be reaffirmed? No. Is there generic authority to reaffirm elders? No.

Someone might say, “But suppose an elder becomes unqualified?” Then that individual must be dealt with on an individual basis; more will be said on this point later. “What if all the elders become unqualified?” Then they will probably not submit to a reaffirmation anyway. The point is that a reaffirmation of an eldership is an idea of man—not something that someone would derive from a study of the Scriptures.

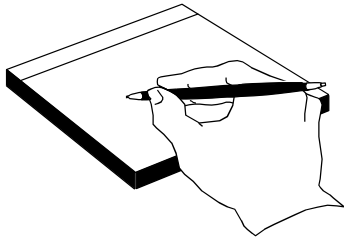
One problem that arises is that maybe in one case out of three, when elders get to the point where they cannot function well, they recognize this themselves. And because of that they will sometimes step down when they see that they cannot function because of...mental faculties, they can’t do it because of problems in their family, they can’t do it because they’re taking care of a spouse.

These situations do occur, and many elders do resign because of them, in which case reaffirmation on the part of a congregation is unnecessary. The man in question has re-evaluated himself and decided it is best, under his current circumstances, to resign. He realizes that he can no longer serve the way God intended for elders to function; conscientious men make these decisions all the time because it is in the best interests of the body of Christ to do so.

But I think part of the problem is that we’ve seen elders as a lifelong, honorary position, which it is not.

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Notes From The Editor



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Intent

In the February 1996 issue of *Defender*, I wrote an article concerning marriage. In one of the paragraphs I dealt with how one becomes married. I began that section by writing, “First, there must be the decision by both parties (man and woman) to live together as husband and wife, to be married to each other. They must have the intention of being married to each other. A ‘shotgun’ wedding would not be recognized as a marriage. Adam accepted Eve as his wife when God brought her to him. ‘And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh’ (Gen. 2:23-24).” Personally, I only know of one person who challenged this statement at the time it was written. However, most are in complete agreement with this statement, as others have also written.

Brother Woods wrote, “The requisites of a valid scriptural marriage, in our day, include the following: There must be the *intention* to enter into such a union.... The agreement to enter into marriage must be unrestrained; it must be freely entered into, and with full consent of both” (298). Brother Roy Lanier wrote, “Intention to live together.... It is unthinkable that...God would join two in holy marriage who had no love for each other and had no intention of forming a union which would fulfill the purposes of God” (89, 91). Then brother Tom Warren, in a chapter titled “What is Marriage? When Does it Occur?,” wrote, “When that pronouncement is made to (or over) such an eligible man and an eligible woman (in the face of their mutual understanding of the significance of such), the man and the woman will be ‘joined together’ (by God) as husband and wife” (32).

Brethren, it is sad that statements such as these are now being used in a way in which they were never intended to be used. It is extremely disturbing that some would use the writings of a person who has passed on into eternity in a way that the person would never have intended it to be used. They were not dealing with the situation where someone does not marry for the proper reason.

Recently there arose a situation to which some have applied statements of intent to get married as necessary for there to be a marriage in which I would never have imagined when I wrote that article for “Defender.” The situation is that a man who was not an American citizen “married” a woman who is an American for the purpose of obtaining citizenship in the United States. After obtaining that citizenship, they then divorced. Some are now saying that this man has the right to marry because there was no intent of marriage when they went through the marriage ceremony. The only intent which existed was the intent of obtaining citizenship.

I know that those who are making this application could take my article as *proof* that this person has the right to now get married, or that I am in agreement that this person now has the right to get married (to my knowledge no one has quoted from my article, they have quoted the others). While I cannot prove that the others would not agree to this application, I know that I do not agree with it and do not believe they would agree with it for a second. It is a grave disservice to a faithful brother in Christ who has written something and then passed on to his reward; and then for brethren to take what he wrote and make an application to which the individual, were he still alive, would never agree. Years ago I saw Dan Billingsly use this tactic in furthering his false doctrine. It was disgusting then, and it is today also.

Let us take a look at this situation. There was an intent to get married. While the purpose of the marriage was not what God intended marriage to be, there was still an intent to get married. To deny the intent of marriage in this situation is to deny the obvious. They intended to get married so he could defraud his way into the country. Since intent to get married exists in this situation, they are married (by both God and the laws of the land).

Consider some three examples of where the purpose of the marriage is not what God intends it to be (as is the situation under consideration). Imagine a situation (does not take much imagination) where one unmarried

person has a great deal of money. Then think of a *gold digger* who decides to *go after* this rich person. The one who is rich falls in love with this *gold digger* and they get married. The rich person loves the other and marries them with the full intent of it lasting “till death do us part.” However, the *gold digger* is only thinking of getting the money: marry and then divorce with a big monetary settlement. According to those who are misusing this intent argument, the rich person would be married while the *gold digger* was never married because that one did not really have the intent to be married, just to steal the rich person’s money.

A wealthy individual puts in his will that for his son to inherit his money, he must marry and have children (again something that has taken place). Thus, the son seeks a woman to marry for the simple reason to obtain his inheritance. The woman whom he finds knows nothing about the inheritance and falls madly in love with the son. The son cares nothing for the lady and his only concern is the inheritance he will receive. They marry and have a child (meeting the stipulation of the will). The son gets his inheritance and then immediately files for a civil divorce. According to the perverted view now being presented to us, the son was never married because he only intended to obtain the inheritance. However, what about the woman in this scenario? She loved the son and married him for better or for worse till death do us part. According to this new view (actually a misapplication of the idea of intent), she was married to him but he was never married to her. Who can believe such nonsense.

The Bible says, “it is better to marry than to burn” (1 Cor. 7:9). The idea of burn is burning with lust. If a young man is burning with lust toward a young lady and he decides to marry her so she will have sex with him, is he married? What about the young lady who marries this man, is she married? What if she marries him with the proper intent and purpose, is she married then? If the man who marries this young lady for the purpose of sexual relations, as the Bible teaches him to do, but he is not married because the intent is simply for sex, then when they have sexual relations is he simply committing fornication, and is she not committing fornication? Surely all can see how ludicrous this view is.

In the actual situation which some are attempting to defend with this new intent view, there is a misunderstanding of intent and purpose. In the actual situation, as well as in all these examples, there was an intent to get married. Yet, in each of the situations the

purpose of getting married is not what God intended. However, there is a difference between intent and purpose in all these cases. In each case they intended to get married (that is they intended to go through the ceremony, intended to say I do, intended to pass themselves off as married to each other), yet their purpose was something totally different (to get into the country, to get someone else’s money, to get an inheritance, to have sexual relations). In each case they are married! In each case the only way they can get out of the marriage with the right to remarry is for their spouse to commit fornication. If they divorce for another cause and remarry, then they continue to live in adultery according to Matthew 5:32; 19:9. MH

Works Cited:

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(Continued from Page 1)

Amen!! Probably, everyone can name an elder in a particular congregation that is not doing the work God expects of him, yet he continues to be listed with those who do labor. In some instances he is barely able to make it to worship once or twice a month. Probably, it is respect for such a man and his past achievements that leads to such an arrangement, but it would have been far better for him to have been honored when he stepped down than for everyone to attempt to maintain an impossible facade.

Some are enticed to become elders more for the decision-making power (oversight of the congregation) than they have been for the task of shepherding (feeding, leading, and protecting the flock). Of course, such is the wrong motivation, but it happens—and frequently the congregation does not become aware of it until after it occurs. However, reaffirming **all** the elders is not the way to deal with one that does not belong.

It is a functioning position; there’s no such thing as an *ex officio* elder. Therefore, I don’t think that it’s wrong to reaffirm elders or to let it be known that an elder is gonna serve for five years or ten years....

What?! How does a problem with one particular elder warrant a re-evaluation process of them all? And where did the idea of *term limits* come from? Does 1 Timothy 3 really **imply** reaffirmation? If so, is there any historical data to back up this notion? Or does not

history deal with these offices as lifetime appointments? The silence of the Scriptures on this question does not permit the practice; as always, the question should be: “What in the Scriptures would authorize it?” Surely, God, who foresaw that sin would require the sacrifice of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, as a sacrifice for our sins from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), knew that questions would arise about the ability of some to remain elders.

One can hardly imagine imposing upon the church the ideas of our political system (two years for Congressmen, four for the President, six for Senators)—with the opportunity to be re-elected, if they are popular enough with the citizens. Of all things, brethren do not deserve to be bombarded with campaign promises: “Reaffirm me, and I will get us a good deal on getting the parking lot paved.” “Say, I am the one who will delay withdrawing fellowship from your son; vote for me.”

Although men may not be appointed elders for life, they should be elders as long as they remain qualified and are capable of doing the work. Why should they not be? The Lord’s church should not become a political battleground or a popularity contest. They must be free to uphold the Word of God without fear of reprisal by some members who are less than spiritual.

...and then, according to the principles of Acts chapter six, Let there arise from the congregation hopefully a wellspring of support.

These words are not found in Acts 6, and that chapter does not refer to the appointment of elders anyway. The seven men selected to “serve tables” are likewise not called *deacons*, although their work would be more consistent with their labors. Paul does not cite either the work or the selection process used in Acts 6:1-7 when he discusses deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-12). There is no evidence that indicates that Acts 6 is intended as a model for the selection of elders or deacons, but even if it were intended to be so used, it says absolutely nothing about reaffirmation. Acts 6 simply shows a specific solution to a specific problem.

I know this makes elders, perhaps, feel a little bit vulnerable, but preachers, hey, welcome to the club.

Mmm. How tempting it is to place elders in the same precarious position that preachers often are! While it is the case that some preachers have abused and taken advantage of the good faith of elders, we cannot even count all of the preachers who have been unjustly fired. In many cases elderships have intentionally violated the normal “90-day” agreement, occasion-

ally saying, “You do not have it in writing.” Problems of this type have resulted from the erroneous view of some elders that preachers are disposable *hired hands* instead of co-laborers in the kingdom of God.

However “two wrongs do not make a right,” and while some might rejoice for “the shoe to be on the other foot” for a change, the idea of “term limits” on elders is not Bible-based.

If indeed it is true that elders feel a little vulnerable here, I believe that an elder, to rule well, should have his name come from the congregation and affirmed by the congregation.

We have no problem with this technique, since the specific process of appointing these men is not set forth. There must be a dozen ways in which congregations have chosen to initiate the process (some of them not too shrewd). Most elders were suggested by the congregation or approved by them in some manner.

A book that has been suggested, Flavil Yeakley’s book, *Church Leadership and Organization*, indicates that we need to understand that *presbuteros* or *episcopos* or *poimeen*, that these words indicate a position of service and not a position just of honor, though it certainly is a position of honor.

Yeakley may emphasize it, but this view is first set forth in the inspired Word of God. This observation is not a putdown of the book, which is well-organized and quite helpful. Although he does suggest that elderships determine if they still have the consent of the congregation to serve as elders, he does not outline a reaffirmation process (23).

Yeakley also includes a pertinent quote by J. W. McGarvey, whom he calls “one of the greatest scholars the Restoration Movement ever produced.” McGarvey said that “if we give up the belief that we must have Bible authority for what we do, we have abandoned the only ground on which the restoration of the New Testament church can be accomplished” (13). We agree wholeheartedly and point out once again that reaffirmation has **no** biblical authority.

Is the Reaffirmation of Elders a Violation of the Scriptures?

Not long after the December 22, 2002 *Spiritual Perspectives*’ article on Reaffirmation was published [*Spiritual Perspectives* is the local bulletin Gary Summers edits], I received an inquiry regarding the matter, which included the important question: “Is the reaffirmation a violation of Scriptures?” In the reply given, I first stressed that there is already in place a way of dealing with an elder who has become unqualified. Of course, Timothy, as an evangelist, was to rebuke those

who were sinning (1 Tim. 5:20), but what about removing one?

If he refused to repent of his sins, he would need to be withdrawn from, as any other member would be (Mat. 18:15-17). But what if he simply cannot function as an elder and will not resign? My response was (and is) as follows:

However, there remains a Biblical way of dealing with such a situation; that situation should be dealt with by the elders, who oversee the flock. Just as they should guard against a wolf in sheep's clothing, they should tell a fellow elder that he is no longer qualified. It is their responsibility; on what basis does it devolve back upon the congregation? Is this a matter of opinion? How can it be, when the elders have been given a specific task of taking care of the church of God (1 Tim. 3:5)? ... If God has put someone in charge of the congregation (and He has, as you pointed out), then why not let them do their job? Why circumvent these

men in order to ask those who are not authorized to make such a decision?

The idea of the flock deciding whether or not to follow certain men is dangerous and invites all sorts of petty jealousies to surface—not to mention playing politics. If the elders are qualified and performing their work, they should not have to test their popularity periodically. What if Jeremiah used popularity to decide if he should continue preaching? Jesus didn't ask the Pharisees for a vote of confidence. Neither did God set up the church with a built-in reaffirmation process. To answer your question, yes, I believe reaffirmation involves a Scriptural violation.

This letter was mailed March 3, 2003, and to date there has been no reply. Brethren need to begin, before adopting this innovation, to evaluate this concept very carefully, in light of the Scriptures. And those who have erroneously adopted it need to repent.

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The Heart

Mark McWhorter

There are many references to the heart in the Scriptures. Almost all of them have reference to the spiritual heart. But if one looks closely, the spiritual references also have truth in the physical realm. This really should not be surprising. God never uses an impossibility in the physical realm to teach a spiritual truth.

God is all knowing. The fact may be that those to whom He spoke in ancient times may not have had a full understanding of the physical parallel He was making, but we can in many instances. This would seem to help demonstrate just how all-knowing and timeless our God really is.

In Deuteronomy 10:16, God tells the children of Israel to "circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart." He wants them to free their hearts of the restraints of sin, to fear Him, to love Him, to serve Him, and to walk in all His ways. In the physical realm the heart has a foreskin called the pericardium. In certain pathological conditions the pericardium becomes stiff, hard, and constrictive. It will not allow the heart to expand and contract the way it needs to in order to adequately deliver blood to the body. If this situation is allowed to continue the individual will die. Surgery is necessary and the foreskin of the heart is circumcised, cut away, from the heart. God knew that one day we would truly understand the physical/spiritual parallel He was making. Of course, they knew about Abraham's circumcision so they were able to understand the con-

cept God was commanding.

In Romans 1:21, those who have become vain in their imaginations (reasoning) are said to have their hearts darkened. Their spiritual hearts are sick. Their hearts are not thinking the thoughts nor pulsing the thoughts throughout their being that God would have them thinking. In the physical realm, when the heart becomes sick from clogged arteries it tends to become dark. It especially turns dark when the blockages are so bad that a heart attack occurs. The damaged area of the heart is no longer the vibrant healthy red color it should be. It is now a very dark red and becomes useless. We now know full well the parallel God was making between the physical and spiritual heart.

Christ stated that those who are well do not need a physician but those who are sick do (Mat. 9:12). Is it any wonder that the Creator of all would use physical analogies for the spiritual realm? The Great Physician does not just look at the outward man, He looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7) (could be reference to echocardiograms or open heart surgery). He looks inside and can see the secrets of the heart (Psa. 44:21) (again, reference to several cardiac tests and procedures today). He is able to revive (resuscitate) the hearts of the contrite ones (Isa. 57:15). And if need be, He can perform a heart transplant for those with hard hearts (Eze. 11:19-20).

What a great and marvelous God we have. He is timeless. He is all-knowing. He is our Great Physician.

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Run by Alpha Five Runtime, this system is a free standing, automatically installed program designed for

the preacher and his work. Full tutorial for operation is included in the database. Email Tom Wacaster at tswacaster@aol.com and put in your subject line, "Minister's File System" or "Membership Database Program" and he will answer any questions and/or put your copy in the mail the day he receives your order. The cost for the Minister's Filing system is \$55 and the Membership database program is \$75.

Brother Wacaster recently completed a commentary on Galatians also. These are selling for \$10 (Texas residents must add tax). For a limited time brother Wacaster will pay the shipping on the books. This would be a good time to obtain one of these books.

He also has another book, at the printers but he should be receiving them this month. This is going to be a series of books covering Psalms. This first book covers Psalms 1-25 and will be over 300 pages. He is selling this book for \$12 and for a limited time he will pay the postage on the book.

Bellview Lectures

On page 6 of this issue there is more information concerning this year's lectureship program including the schedule (speakers, topics, and times). We would love to have every person who reads this to be able to come and be with us during this wonderful time. I know, from past lectureships, that it would be profitable for every Christian to attend. You would be encouraged both by hearing the lessons and enjoying the sweet fellowship of others of like precious faith, plus you would be an encouragement to others.

However, we realize that not everyone has the opportunity to come to Pensacola for our lectureship. With technology the way it is today, there are opportunities for those who cannot physically come here to attend the

lectures to still hear every lesson live if you have access to the internet. The faithful brethren of the Online Academy of Biblical Studies have made available to us the right to broadcast our lectureship live on their web site: www.oabs.org. After the lectureship the lessons will be posted to their archive section. They have provided this service for the Bellview Lectures for the past two years. Simply go to their web site and then go to live events and follow the instructions given there. While you are there, you might want to look at the other lectureship they have available plus their classes for the school. If you cannot be here watch us on the internet. Also, please sign the guest book, and if you have a question for the open forum, email it to us.

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