

Godliness

By Robert Turner

"Godliness" is sometimes incorrectly explained as "God-like-ness" or having the quality of God. The word, eusebeia, does denote an affinity for God and things of God; but Moulton and Milligan, Alford, and other Greek philologists note that the word was common among the Greeks, and that it denoted "an operative, cultive piety rather than of inherent character." That means it is a characteristic subject to cultivation, or is produced, rather than inherent. Vine says "that piety which, characterized by a Godward attitude, does that which is well-pleasing to Him." (emph., rft.)

Put simply, a "godly" person wants to please God, and he does that which God has revealed as His will for man. The result is "godliness."

Living "godly" in this present world (**Titus 2:11**), puts one in the role of pilgrim, "looking for a city" and doing all things "as unto the Lord." Aware of past sins and of present imperfections, the godly man confesses his constant need for the Savior, his High Priest and his offering for the remission of sins. Such an attitude and manner of life is called "walking in the light" (**1 Jn.1:7**).

We are fully aware that this "fellowship with God" would be impossible but for Christ and His sacrifice of Himself for us, hence it is a wholly unmerited blessing. But the "godly" individual is not created so against his will, nor apart from his effort. The "God" standard is eternal, the "means" by which godliness is attained was in God's eternal purpose, and in the fullness of time was perfected; but the individual must hear, believe and obey the

voice of God to be "godly" or have "godliness."

Vine says, "In **1 Tim.6:3** 'the doctrine which is according to godliness' signifies that which is consistent with godliness, in contrast to false teachings; in **Tit. 1:1** 'the truth which is according to godliness' is that which is productive of godliness ... etc." A godly person doesn't just happen to be that way, nor is he particularly elected, called or blessed. He puts his trust in Jesus Christ, and works hard to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts." He uses the means God universally provided to cultivate and produce the result.

The godly man is acutely aware that godliness is not a static condition attained, but is a movement, a manner of life. An "honest man" may stumble at some point, but his conscience stabs him and he makes correction. He is not content to keep quiet and reap the ill-gotten gain. Nor will a godly man condone a way that is contrary to the way of God. He may sin--he will sin--but his very character cries out in protest, and he makes correction. His inner guidance system is "locked on" to the way of God and he wants to keep it that way.

Can a godly man become ungodly? Oh yes! (**2 Pet. 2:1, 4, 20-22**) But the remedy for fear is love, perfected by abiding in God. To this end the godly man studies his Bible, prays, meets with fellow saints for worship, and works to save others. He has little time to worry about temporal matters, for heaven and eternity are in view.



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Where Do Elders Come From?

By Paul Earnhart

The scarcity of functioning elders (bishops, pastors) in local churches has led some Christians to conclude that they are a rare breed with rare qualities. Otherwise, they reason, why would they be so difficult to come by? Contrary to this rather discouraging view, elders do not have to be imported from outer space. They are generated from ordinary human beings from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation," and perhaps it will help identify the reason for their scarcity if we trace, step by step, where elders originate.

First of all, and elementally, elders come from strong Christians, men and women who by the power of God have been radically reborn (**John 3:3-6**). Now, here are some remarkable people. They have given up everything for the Lord's sake, claiming not even their breath as their own (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 2:1-2**). Theirs is a life of utter trust in the Son of God (**Galatians 2:20**). Why should we be surprised that something special should arise in

The answer to the shortage of every kind of worker in the kingdom of God is to get each child of God among us to be totally committed. If we can do that, the problem will take care of itself in time. If not, we will keep on complaining about the shortage of elders today and assure an even greater shortage tomorrow.

the characters of folk like this? They will love God supremely and care about others in a self-sacrificial way.

Secondly, elders (Greek presbuteroi, older men), by definition, originate from Christians who are men. There is nothing special or remarkable or difficult here. From the outset, men as well as women have been touched by the appeal of the gospel (**Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 8:12; 17:12,34**) and we can logically anticipate that wherever the gospel is preached, this will con-

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tinue to be so.

Thirdly, elders are to be taken from among Christian men who are mature in years (older) and in the faith ("not a novice," **1 Timothy 3:6**). The bulk of the bishop's required qualities are no more than would be expected in any mature disciple: "... sober-minded, orderly, given to hospitality ... no brawler, no striker; but gentle, not contentious, no lover of money ... good testimony from them that are without ..." (**1 Timothy 3:7**) "... not selfwilled, not soon angry ... a lover of good ... just, holy, self-controlled; holding to the faithful word ..." (**Titus 1:6-9**). Every Christian, without exception, is expected to grow and mature into "a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ . . ."

(**Ephesians 4:13**). There is nothing unusual about the Lord's servants becoming increasingly like Him. It is their failure to grow up that is considered aberrant (**1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:12-14**).

Fourthly, elders are drawn from mature Christian men who are married. The Holy Spirit has indicated that the elder is to be "the husband of one wife" (**1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6**). Here, again, there is no special obstacle. As a matter of course, most men marry.

Fifthly, elders are to be taken from mature Christian men who are married and have children. His children are to be believers and those still in his household are to be respectfully obedient (**Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 3:4**). There is nothing remarkable about a married man having children. Most married men are fathers, and from such a characteristic population new disciples were drawn in the past and will be drawn today. Nor should it be thought unusual for a Christian father's children to be faithful disciples and obedient to him. Godly parents will, more often than not,

lead their children to serve the Lord (**Proverbs 22:6**). In New Testament times, it was not uncommon for whole households to be converted (**Acts 10:24; 11:14; 16:31,33**).

From among mature Christian family men with many different abilities there are bound to be some who are effective teachers (**1 Timothy 3:2**), able to nurture and train their brethren in the righteous ways of the Savior and protect them from the deceptions of false teachers (**Titus 1:9; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-5**).

Now, from all these qualifications of elders there is nothing so significant as the fact that they are devoted Christians. That they are men, married men, family men is not anything special. That they possess native skills as teachers gives them no distinction, either. Many men who have no faith in Christ at all could say the same. In the case of elders, it is the unqualified devotion that these men have to Christ that gives meaning to their family relationships and to their God-given skills.

I cannot tell you how often I have heard complaints about the absence of elders in local churches and the difficulty of finding qualified men to serve. It is not helpful merely to describe the problem and complain about it. We need to find the exact source of this critical shortage and formulate some godly solutions.

One thing we must face is that the Holy Spirit makes elders out of devoted Christians and churches that are filled with half-hearted and indifferent disciples don't have any material to work with. The answer to the shortage of every kind of worker in the kingdom of God is to get each child of God among us to be totally committed. If we can do that, the problem will take care of itself in time. If not, we will keep on complaining about the shortage of elders today and assure an even greater shortage tomorrow. Until we are willing to deal with our own shortfall in devotion, it is a little unrealistic to complain about the other fellow's.



Splendid Discontent

By James W. Adams

If there is one peccadillo that characterizes this generation it is the mania for change. Change for the sake of change is thought to be a mark of liberation from "tradition" and of intellectual sophistication. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, though not necessarily advocating change for the sake of change, paid tribute to the desire for change when she wrote, "*The splendid discontent of God with chaos made the world; and from the discontent of man, the world's best progress springs.*" However, she failed to note that *not all of man's discontent is "splendid."*

A more practical and perceptive statement statesman, inventor and author said, "*All human inventions have their inconveniences. We feel those of the present, but see nor fear those of the future, and hence we often make troublesome changes without amendment and frequently for the worse*" (Benjamin Franklin). It can be and often is "from bad to worse." Someone has likened this to a "farmer burning down his barn to get rid of the rats."

While change is the law of growth, it is not always benign. Not all growth is healthy nor progressive. One can blow up a balloon to several times its normal size, but balloons often burst under pressure to which they are thus subjected. The result is destructive, not constructive.

Our generation has seen more changes than another in human history, but the "discontent" that has produced them has not always been "splendid," hence many of the changes have been malignant rather than benign. This is not only true in the secular realm, but professed churches of Christ have likewise undergone radical changes that have not always been benign and constructive but malignant and destructive.

Advocates of changes, the discontented, in congregations have the obligation to give an adequate reason why changes should be made. Of first consideration would be whether or not the current situation meets the demands of Scripture. If not, change is not only advisable but essential. Second in importance is whether the proposed changes would bring the situation into harmony with Scripture.

The question of Scripture having been settled, the proposed changes should meet the demands of expediency. Are they viable? Are they more effective in accomplishing the objectives of a congregation's work and worship? Are they spiritually motivated, or merely an effort to accommodate the pressures of modern subjectivism, emotionalism, and anarchism in religion? Do they constitute an abdication to the *devotees to novelty*, or will they actually promote edification and soul-saving influence upon the believer and the unbeliever.

No Christian should cling to the old simply because it is old. Neither should the new be desired because it is new. *Many things are old because they have been tried, proven, and not found wanting.* Things are not right because they are old, but often are old because they are right. On the other hand, things are not wrong because they are new and different.

The old and the new should both meet the demands of *Scripture and expediency*, and the decision to change or not to change made on this basis. If "discontent" issue in benevolent change, it is indeed "splendid" If it merely bows to the spirit of novelty, it is neither benign nor progressive, only "worldly." The philosophy of the poet, Wilcox tempered by that of statesman, Franklin, would seem to be safe course in religious matters as well as secular.

The point of this article is well illustrated by three classes of persons noted in the Scriptures. The *scribes and Pharisees* were opponents of change by reason of their devotion to their purely human traditions. Jesus rebuked their attitude by saying, "No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith: The old is better" (**Luke 5:39**). On the other hand, *the philosophers of Athens* "spent their time in nothing else, but to tell, or hear some new thing" (**Acts 17:21**). The right attitude is exemplified by Cornelius, the Gentile Centurion, who said, "Now therefore are we all present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (**Acts 10:34**).

