

18

"Able To Teach Others Also"

- 2 Ti 2:2

Thousands of men enroll each year in seminaries of their choice, hoping to become equipped to do the work of the ministry. There they are taught the Word of God and every related subject imaginable. There they are instructed on how to interpret the Scriptures, how to formulate a theological framework, and how to "do ministry." Everything from church history to homiletics to hermeneutics is available to anyone who wishes to enhance his effectiveness in ministering the Word of God. Church leaders do indeed need to be trained, but the seminary system is an inefficient tool to use in reaching this goal.

Before proposing the biblical model for training elders, let's first lay out a typical scenario that one encounters after making a decision to go to seminary. First, since in most cases the would-be seminarian does not live near a seminary, he must relocate to an area where there is a seminary. Second, the would-be seminarian must be certain that he has the financial means not only to set up house in this new location but also to pay tuition and fees. These expenses typically add up to upwards of \$2,000 per quarter (sometimes even more than that). The would-be seminarian is expected to pay these fees before the actual training ends. This usually means that the seminarian must work a full-time job while completing his education. Of course, he may opt to take fewer classes and prolong the number of years it takes to earn the degree. This, however, is considered undesirable since, ideally, the seminarian wants to begin his professional ministry as soon as possible. Any delay means more time in the secular work force instead of in the "Lord's work." Naturally this puts much stress on the seminarian's family, and especially his wife who, in some cases, is expected to support her husband financially. This is even more of a burden if there are children involved. Finally, after three or four years of hard work under the direction of university trained Ph.D.s, the seminarian is given a Master of Divinity degree (M.Div) and is ordained by his denomination on the basis of his accomplishments.

There are at least four major problems with the scenario given above. The first problem is that the seminarian must leave his local church to receive this kind of training. Second, university-trained professors (not church leaders) are doing the training. Third, the seminarian must pay exorbitant amounts of money to learn the Word of God. And fourth, the seminarian's newly acquired degree is somehow seen as qualifying him to be a church leader.

In the NT it is quite clear that training men for leadership positions is the responsibility of each individual church. A man who senses that he has been gifted by God in the areas of leadership and teaching is to be permitted to exercise these gifts so long as he meets certain qualifications which we will examine later. Moreover, such a man has the right to be trained in these areas by those leaders within his own local church. In apostolic times there were no seminaries to attend. Instead, when an apostle was sent to a city to organize those who had come to believe, it was he that was responsible for training men to be leaders in that church. We have several examples of this in the NT. In Ac 11, after Stephen proclaimed the good news to those in Antioch, Luke records that the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas there to strengthen them. Barnabas in turn found Paul and "so for a whole year

Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people" (11:22-26). Ac 13:1 indicates that in addition to Paul and Barnabas there were more "prophets and teachers" who had been sent to Antioch, presumably to train men at the Antioch church. After their initial evangelistic visits to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, Paul and Barnabas returned to these cities and appointed elders in each church (14:21-23). We must assume here that Paul was consistent with his own policy of appointing only qualified elders, whose qualifications he lays down elsewhere (1 Ti 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9). Another instance of this training pattern is found in Ac 19. Here Luke says that Paul held daily discussions in a lecture hall for a period of two years (vv 9-10).

The purpose for calling attention to all of these passages is to show the apostolic pattern of training elders. Far from insisting that a prospective elder uproot and move his family to a new location to receive this training from the apostles, the reverse is true-the apostles went to the prospective elder. This pattern is by no means confined to the book of Acts but is also found in the pastoral epistles. Paul left both Timothy (in Ephesus, 1 Ti 1:3) and Titus (in Crete, Tit 1:5) for the purpose of setting the churches in order. A major part of this responsibility entailed the selection and training of elders (1 Ti 3:1-7; Tit 1:5). Again we find that this training takes place within the church and by church leaders.

This leads to the second point; namely, that church elders (not university professors) are responsible for training other potential elders. Paul makes this clear in 2 Ti 2:2 where he commands Timothy, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." Paul seems to be setting a pattern here for training elders. Timothy was to train reliable men, and they in turn were to train others. There was to be an unbroken chain, as it were, of trained leaders. Three points may be made about Paul's statement. First, an apostle's stay in any city was only temporary and was meant to wean a newly formed church so that it could stand on its own. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Ti 4:21 that after Timothy's ministry was completed in Ephesus he should do his best to go back to Paul before winter. He gives Titus similar instructions in Tit 3:12-hence their temporary stay. Second, the men that were trained by Timothy and Titus were members of the church in which they were trained. The men who were so trained became leaders in that church. There was no such thing as the current practice of calling an unfamiliar pastor from afar to lead a church. Third, once there were trained men in a church all subsequent training was to be done by these newly trained men. Since the apostles' stay was only temporary, the only way Paul could ensure that the Faith would remain pure and alive was to command Timothy to "entrust [it] to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Ti 2:2). In other words, after Timothy and Titus were gone, it was up to those who had been trained by them to follow their example and train other qualified men. Indeed, they were not only responsible, they were in fact obligated to find other qualified men whom they could train. This flies in the face of the current practice of the church wherein a would-be church leader is informed that he first must spend several years in a seminary; and even then it is more likely that he will end up with a church of his own elsewhere rather than go back to the church from which he was sent. It is those who are currently in charge of the church who should be held responsible for this man's training.

In a recent essay on the church, one writer has concluded: "theological seminaries and divinity schools equip pastor/teachers and others to instruct people in the Word. This is a fulfillment of Paul's command to Timothy: 'And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also' (2 Ti 2:2)." (John P. Newport, *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church*, 31-32). Are Paul's words to Timothy really fulfilled by the seminary? We have already seen that Paul's words assume that it is the church elder who is to do the training, not the university professor. Any attempt, therefore, to justify the seminary via Paul's statement in 2 Ti

2:2 is ludicrous. We are simply forced to admit, however sadly, that the church has abdicated its responsibility in this area.

But perhaps even more abhorrent than the church's negligence in training its own leaders is the fact that the would-be church leader's only recourse is to pay thousands of dollars to receive training that he is supposed to be receiving free of charge. Paul warned against men who require money to teach the Scriptures ("who think that godliness is a means to financial gain," 1 Ti 6:5), and he made a clear distinction between what they do and what Christians are supposed to do ("Unlike so many, we do not peddle the Word of God for profit," 2 Co 2:17). What does it mean to "peddle the Word of God" if not to require payment for teaching it? Yet this is precisely what occurs in the seminary system-and Christianity as a whole has not only tolerated this practice, but has embraced and perpetuated it! When Jesus sent out the Twelve he told them, "freely you have received, freely give" (Mt 10:8). Surely this principle applies across the board, whether the issue is the gospel message or the content of the Faith. Is it likely that Jesus or Paul would have commended the current seminary practice of financially bilking would-be elders? Not if we are to limit ourselves to their recorded statements about such matters. In addition to the passages above we may add Paul's statement to the Ephesian elders in Ac 20. There Paul insists that while he was with them (three years according to v 31) he did not hesitate to proclaim to them "anything that would be helpful," but taught them from house to house (v 20); he did not hesitate to proclaim to them "the whole will of God" (v 27); and he did all this without coveting "anyone's silver or gold or clothing" (v 33). In fact, Paul said that "these hands of mine have supplied my own needs" (v 34).

What, someone may ask, of all the statements in the NT which seem to indicate that the teacher is to be paid (e.g., Ga 6:6)? Without even addressing just what it is that the disciple is supposed to "share" with the teacher, of this much we may be certain: it is one thing to give voluntarily to those who are teaching the Word of God; it is quite another thing to compel the disciple to give money and withhold the Word of God from him unless he pays up! The question is, Which one of these two cases more closely resembles the seminary system? The answer, of course, is the latter. It's as though in Paul's list of qualifications for an elder (1 Ti 3) tucked somewhere between "not given to drunkenness" and "not a recent convert" there is the statement "and not a poor man, lest he not be able to pay his teacher"! There can be little doubt that Paul's response would have been nothing short of outrage had anything resembling this current practice been attempted in his day.

One final objection to the seminary system has to do with the unhealthy emphasis that is given to a degree program when determining who is to be appointed an elder in the church. The major concern of the ordination board is what the ordainee believes and where he obtained his degree rather than whether he meets the moral requirements set forth by Paul in 1 Ti 3 and Tit 1. In most cases, if the ordainee has his seminary degree he's a shoo-in. There is no serious consideration given to the lifestyle of the ordainee or whether he has proven his ability to have charge over the church of God by an examination of his family life. How could there be? None of the men on the ordination board actually knows the ordainee in any intimate way. None of them has ever made it a point to spend several months with the ordainee on an intimate basis so that the board could know for certain whether or not this man is really qualified. The most they can go by is what the ordainee says about himself-not exactly a fool-proof method for determining the qualifications of a would-be elder. Again, we are forced to take a look at the apostolic pattern. When Paul did leadership training he stayed with potential leaders (as we have already seen) for two or three years. No doubt he instructed Timothy and Titus to do the same. The reason Paul had no problem emphasizing moral character as the main ingredient for an elder is because in such an intimate, one on one disciplining of potential elders it would become increasingly evident who was qualified and who was not. Paul was not so

much interested in mass production of elders (as seems to be the emphasis of the seminary) as he was in pouring his own life into a few "reliable" men who in turn would do the same with others. In today's seminary system it is virtually impossible to have this kind of "life-style" discipleship. The attempt by some seminaries to form fellowship groups that meet weekly with a seminary professor for one hour does little toward developing intimate relationships between mentor and protégé. But then that is not so surprising when one considers that the seminary is merely a product of the church, which has its own problems with accountability and intimacy.

The overall inadequacy of the seminary raises several pertinent questions. Is it wrong for someone to go to seminary? Can someone legitimately be involved in the seminary system and at the same time oppose it? Just where is the blame for all of this to be placed?

Perhaps the blame that this article seems to place upon seminaries is in fact misplaced. Perhaps the seminary is nothing more than a necessary evil. The church has abdicated its responsibility (indeed, its obligation) to train its own potential leaders. If the church won't do it then of course it is better that the seminary do it rather than it not be done at all. So, in answer to the last question, the blame ultimately falls upon those leaders in the church who refuse to heed Paul's injunction to Timothy to train other elders. Because of this abdication of responsibility it is indeed possible for someone to be involved with the seminary system and still oppose it. If there is no leader within his church who is willing to train him, then what is his alternative? He is not so much perpetuating the system as he is begrudgingly conforming to the system's requirements so that a greater goal may be reached-that of becoming trained so that he can train others.

Another question remains. If the seminary system is inadequate, then what is the alternative? The alternative of course is the NT pattern of local elders training other elders. All of the training should be based on current seminary curriculum and standard textbooks, and should cover the full gamut of theological training (including biblical languages) so that nothing essential is left out. Yet the trainers have the added advantage of knowing personally those whom they are training. They have contact with them not only during the training sessions but in the church as well. This is especially true of those in the house church movement. Knowing whether or not potential leaders meet the moral requirements for elders set forth by Paul is not a problem since house churches make it a practice of holding each other personally accountable for the way members conduct their lives.

Are seminaries legitimate? Not if legitimacy is measured by the NT record. Seminaries undermine the method of training elders that Paul handed down to Timothy in three ways: 1) that which is supposed to be given free of charge (namely, the Word of God) is, in effect, being sold ("peddled" to use Paul's word); 2) that which is the responsibility (*obligation*) of the church, or rather, church elders-namely, the training of other elders-has been abdicated and handed over to the seminary; and 3) the training that is received in the seminary is seen somehow as having primary importance for ordination with little or no consideration given to the moral character of the would-be elder.

Pastors and elders are, in assembly-line fashion, being mass-produced at break-neck speeds. With such practices as these, is it any wonder that the institutional church is plagued by lack of integrity in many of her so-called leaders? Is it any wonder that so many high-profile "Christian leaders" are being exposed (primarily by the unbelieving media) with sexual immorality and financial scandal? There can be little doubt that the institutional church and her sister institution, the seminary system, have acted as accomplices in the current state of affairs in the church. The former abdicates its responsibility, while the latter trivializes its responsibility. Neither of these, regardless of what is claimed, has fulfilled Paul's words to Timothy: "And what you have heard from me before many

witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Ti 2:2).

- E.S.

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