

## A Letter to William D. Hyatt from Ray Stedman

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December 29, 1990

Dear Bill,

First, congratulations to you and Yvonne for 25 years together. It is always great to see couples demonstrating marriage fidelity in these days of quickie marriages and even quicker divorces! As you know, Hawaii is very important to Elaine and me as we began our marriage there 45 years ago last October! We are pleased to hear that you enjoyed your time there.

I apologize for some delay in getting this letter back to you, but I was given a heavy assignment in writing by Intersity Press and was asked to get a manuscript back to them by Christmas. That meant writing-for 6-7 hours a day in the intervening time, hence my delay.

It was encouraging to me, however, to note your concern for the [PBC] South eldership. You are quite right that some remedial action needs to be taken immediately to get the elders back on the track of biblical eldering. You ask: How do elders actually come to understand where the Lord of the church is leading it? The answer is basically threefold:

1. By accepting the fact that this is their primary role! This is the way they are to use their time. They cannot use the excuse that they have no time for the methods that make this possible, for this is their major responsibility, given by the Lord himself. Jesus is present at PBC South and is active in doing exactly what he said he would do: to open doors for ministering by the people, and close other doors (Cf. Rev 3:7-6). He has revealed to his apostles how he plans to make those open doors known---by speaking to and through elders (Titus 15, Acts 20:26-29).

2. Further, his instrument for making known his mind is the Word of God taught by the Spirit of God. Elders must be constantly studying the Word and discussing it together: It is not enough to assume the knowledge they have gained in the past is sufficient. Light must spring forth from the Word continually. This studying is to be done individually, by twos and threes, and corporately at meetings of the elders together. When various issues come before them they are to ask: what principles from Scripture bear upon this problem? If they haven't time for this then they haven't time to be elders at all, and ought to resign!

To have the time for this they are to deliberately refuse to get involved in solving what you call "practical" problems, the nuts & bolts of running a church. This is clearly the point of Acts 6:2-4: decisions about maintenance problems, building expansions, painting, carpentering, organizing an office, etc., etc., must be passed along to deacons (both male and female) who are qualified by knowledge to deal with such matters. If elders allow themselves to get tangled up with such they are being unfaithful to the task for which the Lord called them!

Furthermore, what they learn in their studying, they are to teach to others---this is what Acts 6:4 calls "the ministry of the word" which elders are to give their attention to. This teaching is directed toward preparing others to be elders, or preparing them to teach in Sunday School or home Bible classes, or to minister from the pulpit, or in evangelistic outreaches. The elders are obviously to the local church what the apostles were to the church at large. They have the ministry of apostleship, carried on at a local level.

3. With this goes the ministry of prayer (Acts. 6:4 again). This, too, is an individual ministry and a collective one. Together they are to pray for wisdom in making decisions, for clarity in understanding Scripture, for harmony in their meetings and in the church, for healing for

those who are sick, for vitality in worship, for courage to discipline biblically for power to be manifested in the ministry of the saints. Again, if they haven't time for this then they haven't time to be elders at all. They must not allow anyone to take this ministry of the word and prayer away from them for it is given to them by their Lord and it is to him they must give on account of their stewardship (Heb. 13:17).

So I urge you to share this letter with the brothers there and take the steps which the Lord will indicate by bringing about unanimous agreement to remedy this faulty situation. The church will never be stronger than its leadership, but if the leadership is faithful the Lord will do great things among them.

Give my loving greetings to all.

Most Cordially,

(Ray)

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