***The 24 Elders

RV73-02***

Please open your Bible to Revelation 4:1-5. We are dealing with the throne room of God. This is segment number 5. In Revelation 4, all Christians from Pentecost to the rapture are in heaven. The church dispensation at this point is over. The body of Christ has been completed. The last believer has been born again that makes up that body. All believers, living and dead, have, at this point (at the beginning of chapter 4), been removed from the earth. The body of mankind which has been left on earth now faces the seven years of tribulation, with its mounting divine judgments, terminating in the Second Coming of Christ.

**The Gems of God's Throne**

The apostle John, in a vision, is taken into heaven through an open door in the sky. John is told that he will be shown the events on earth which are to take place during the tribulation period. John, in Heaven, sees One sitting on a throne who is God the Father. John is awed by a visual display of the glory of God which is emanating from that throne. He compares what he sees to the dazzling appearance of a jasper stone, which is diamond-like in its appearance, and to the blood-red glow of a sardius stone. These two gems symbolize the crystal clear holiness of God which condemns the sinner, and the blood of Jesus Christ which has propitiated the demands of God's justice against the sinner. These stones, on the Old Testament high priest's breastplate, represented the first and the last sons of Jacob: Reuben; and, Benjamin. Thus, they best picture (in a way) Jesus Christ as the Alpha and Omega of God.

**A Rainbow**

John also saw a rainbow, but in a complete form – in the form of a halo which encircled the Father's throne. This bow symbolizes, as it does in Genesis, the faithfulness of God to what He has promised to do. The rainbow signifies, of course, a place over which the storm has already passed. The storm of divine wrath against the lost sinner is forever passed because of Jesus Christ on Calvary. The bow here has the appearance of an emerald – light-green in color, which is suggestive of life: eternal life. The emerald gem on the breastplate of the high priest represented Judah, which means "praise." So this glowing emerald bow (halo) around God's throne is a reminder to us of the praise of which God, and God alone, is worthy. The emerald halo connotes praise to the Father because He has satisfied His own justice against the sinner through Jesus Christ, so the throne of judgment has, for us, become the throne of grace. That light, emerald, green color of that halo, representing the tribe of Judah with the idea of praise, is a fitting surrounding for this throne, where God's grace has so mightily come through in our behalf.

**24 Thrones**

Now, as John looks at the scene further, he sees that there are a group of people who are surrounding the throne of God the Father. We now pick up the picture at that point, in Revelation 4:4: "And roundabout the throne were 24 thrones. The word "roundabout" is that adverb which we have had before. It looks like this in the Greek Bible: "kuklothen." "Kuklothen" means "from all sides around." It means in a circle around the throne of God. This is just as the rainbow is described as being in a "kuklothen" phase: that is, that it surrounded the throne. So, now, around, probably in a horizontal way, rather than in a vertical way – surrounding the throne in a horizontal way are other thrones. The word "throne" is the same Greek word as for the throne of God: "thronos." "Around the throne of God (referring to the Father's throne) were 24 other thrones."

**24 Elders**

"And upon them" (that is, located upon these thrones), John sees a group of human beings: "Upon the thrones I saw 24 elders sitting." The word "elders" looks like this in the Greek: "presbuteros." Actually, this is an adjective. It is the comparative degree of another Greek word: the Greek word "presbus." "Presbus" means "old man." That's the basic form. This is the comparative, which means "older man," emphasizing still more the age factor. This word is used in the Bible to indicate age.

**Age**

For example, in Luke 15:25, it is used in this way: "Now his elder son was in the field. As he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing." This is the story of the prodigal son. This is referring to his older brother. The word "presbuteros" is used here to describe the fact that this brother was the older of the two. So, it is used here in this way to indicate age.

We have another example of that in Acts 2:17: "'And it shall come to pass in the last days,' said God, 'I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. And your young men shall see visions, and your old men (your 'presbuteros' – the same word again) shall dream dreams.'"

We have this used also relative to old women. 1 Timothy 5:2 says, "The elder women," and there we have again the word "presbuteros," emphasizing the fact that they are older in chronological age: "The elder women, as mothers; the younger, as sisters, with all purity." So, the word is used in the Bible to indicate age.

**Dignity**

However, it is also important to recognize that the word "presbuteros" is used in the Bible to express dignity of rank or office. In Matthew 16:21, we have it so used: "From that time forth, Jesus began to show unto His disciples how He must go into Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders." There, the word "elders" is referring to those who hold a certain office. They are elders because they hold an office, not because of their chronological age. ...

You have this used also in terms of the church. In Acts 14:23, it is used in terms of dignity of rank or office: "When they had ordained elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." In these cities that the apostle Paul was traveling through, on his missionary journeys, he would establish, in various places of the city, a local congregation which would be gathering. Sometimes, there might only be one in the whole city. As it grew larger, it was necessary to find other meeting places, and it multiplied into multiple meeting groups. But one of the things that the apostle did (and it was his authority to do this as an apostle), was that he appointed somebody who had the office (who had the rank, and who held the dignity) of what was called a "presbuteros" in that church. He was the elder. He was the administrator of that particular group of believers.

Acts 20:17 uses it in the same way: "And from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." In Ephesus, which was one of the large metropolitan centers of the ancient world, there were many, many places where Christians were meeting all around the city. These Christians would gather in various homes, each of them with a "presbuteros" who was their elder-pastor leader. When the apostle Paul wanted to gather these men together to give them a final farewell, he called the elders of the church (the body of Christ), as it was located in that city of Ephesus. He called all of these local pastors together. He met them there on the beach, and they had their final dramatic farewell that you read about here in Acts 20.

So, the word "presbuteros," here in the book of the Revelation, does refer to age, on the one hand, or to dignity of rank or office.

What John sees is these that he calls "elders" as "sitting." "Sitting" is the word "kathamai." "Kathamai" is a verb which speaks of the body's normal position when it is seated upon a throne. It is in the present tense, which indicates that it indicates that this is a continual position. It is a continual place for these people that he is describing. They are themselves seated. It is active in its meaning, and it is a spiritual principle which is being stated here.

He further sees that these elders who are seated upon these thrones surrounding God's throne are "clothed:" "periballo." "Periballo" means "to cast about" or "to put around." It is used of putting on clothing. This is in the perfect tense. Perfect tense tells us that this action took place sometime in the past, and it continues to the present. These elders, who are upon these thrones surrounding God's throne, have a clothing on them which is symbolizing something. But whatever it symbolizes, it was given to them in the past. It was put on them, and they continue to have it. Furthermore, it is passive in voice, which indicates to us that they did not put this particular garment on themselves, but that it was placed upon them (and the implication is) "by God." And again, a spiritual principle is being stated.

**White Garments**

They were clothed with something that is called "a white garment." The word "white" is the Greek word "leukos." This is an adjective. It is the color which, in the Bible, signifies holiness. So, it indicates the nature of the garments upon these elders. These elders are wearing something that indicates righteousness. It is "a white raiment." The word "raiment" is the Greek word "himaton." "Himaton" refers to an outer garment. It is something that you wear as a mantle or a cloak which is thrown over some kind of undergarments. These elders are clothed in white robes, or white mantles, that are thrown over their shoulders. Garments in Scripture are used to signify a person's spiritual status. So, it is not too hard for us, as we match this concept of white garments up with the rest of the Bible, to see that we are referring to something that deals with their personal righteousness; that is, that they are clothed with garments that indicate that they are in the status of possessing personal righteousness and personal holiness.

**Crowns**

Furthermore, John sees something else. He sees something on their heads. Again, we have this word "epi," just as we had it a moment ago in describing where they were seated. "Epi" means location, and the location of what he sees is on their "kephale." "Kephale" refers to the organ of the body which is known as the head. On the heads of these elders, he sees a crown. It's important for us to notice the word in the Greek for this. It is "stephanos." "Stephanos" is a noun. It is the word for "crown," which has to do with victory. So, we call this the victor's crown. This is in contrast to another Greek word for crown, which is a diadem type of crown, which has to do with imperial authority. This is the kind of crown that a king would wear. This crown is not the crown of somebody who is a kingly ruler. The very word tells us that this crown has to do with some kind of victory. The four basic types of crowns that we read of in the Bible have to do with special honors which are given in heaven to some Christians of the church age. The Old Testament saints are not promised crowns. This is a unique promise to Christians who form the body of Christ. They receive crowns in terms of special honors. We might compare them to the military world. In the military realm, we have the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest recognition of the nation for valor which is above and beyond the call of duty.

1. **The Crown of Rejoicing**

Very briefly, the first of these victory crowns is the crown of rejoicing. The crown of rejoicing is referred to in Philippians 4:1 and in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20. This is an honor for victory of a life of divine good production in Christian service. Some Christians are going to be rewarded with a special crown because their Christian service was not in vain – because their Christian service was performed under the guidance and the empowerment of God the Holy Spirit. That Christian service produced divine good. This is a crown of joy. This is a crown of rejoicing.

1. **The Crown of Righteousness**

There is a second crown that the Bible calls the crown of righteousness. The crown of righteousness is referred to in 2 Timothy 4:7-8. This is honor for victory of living a personal godly life – for Christians who lived most of their life in the status of temporal fellowship, and thus in a status of spirituality. It does make a difference whether you are a spiritual or carnal Christian. It will make a difference in terms of your eternal reward. Christians who log most of their life in the category of spirituality, with known sins confessed, are Christians who are going to be uniquely recognized by the Lord in heaven. The crown that they receive is a crown of righteousness.

1. **The Crown of Life**

Then there's a third crown called the crown of life. The crown of life is referred to in James 1:12 and in Revelation 2:10. This, of course, has nothing to do with eternal life, because when you speak about crowns, you're speaking about rewards. Eternal life is never a reward. Eternal life is always a gift. A reward is something that you have earned (that you have worked for). But the crown of life, then, refers to the honor for victory of progressing to the super-grace level of spiritual maturity, and staying there. Christians who go on with the Lord; who do not get fouled up; who do not get entangled; who do not get conned by preachers and churches and religious organizations; who move on grimly to the objective of the super-grace life; and, who reach the mountain top objective – they stormed the heights, and they hold the position. Those Christians are deserving indeed of being uniquely honored in heaven. They are a rare breed. They have the capacity to handle poverty or prosperity. They have the capacity to resist temptation (the appeals to do evil). They have the capacity to meet trials in their lives with stability. That is super-grace living. And super-grace Christians are going to be recognized in heaven with the crown of life. Not all believers make it to the super-grace level.

1. **The Crown of Glory**

Then there is a fourth crown: the crown of glory. This is referred to in 1 Peter 5:4. This is a crown which is restricted to a certain group of believers of the church age; namely, to pastor-teacher elders of the local church. This is for victory achieved of faithful teaching of doctrine to the flock. This goes to pastors who have been capable of resisting the appeals to be popular, and resisting the appeals to be relevant, instead of being instructive. For those who can hack it out; who can take the guff; who can stand up under fire; and, who can still perform the duty of pastor-teacher, as a communicator of divine viewpoint, are those who are going to be recognized in heaven with this crown of glory.

So, this body of people that John sees have received special crowns of honor for victories won during their lives on earth. Whatever types of crowns these may be which they are wearing, it does tell us this much: that they have achieved a certain position where they have been rewarded. This is described as a "chrusos" crown. This is the word for the precious metal gold, which indicates that these are very worthy and special crowns. ...

We are interested in looking at the symbol of this group of 24. What does a group of 24 indicate? John sees 24 elders dressed in robes which are representing personal holiness. They have crowns on their heads, indicating that they have been rewarded for service on the earth. Well, in the Bible, as you search for this concept of a group of 24, you discover that we have just exactly that sort of thing in the Old Testament – a group of 24, representative of a larger group. During the era of the Mosaic Law system, you do realize that there were thousands upon thousands of Levitical priests. Since all of these priests could not minister in the temple at one time, they were divided into 24 orders to serve a two-week stretch each in their order. 1 Chronicles 24:1-19 describe for you how this division was brought about.

Each order (or each segment) was represented by one priest. One priest represented one of these 24 groups. When these 24 representative priests met together, the whole Jewish priesthood was represented, and acting through them. That's exactly what they did do. The 24 representative priests would gather together and they would make decisions relative to the whole priesthood. Furthermore, when this body of 24 priests gathered together, they, in effect, represented the whole nation of Israel before God, because that's what a priest does. A priest represents others before God.

In the Old Testament, you had a group of priests (an exclusive priesthood) that represented the rest of the people. In the New Testament, that, of course, has been changed, because we are our own priests, and we represent ourselves before God, and we do not represent anyone else before God.

But here is the picture that Revelation is referring back to. That is how you have to interpret Revelation when you come to symbols which the book itself doesn't explain. You look back into the Scriptures and say, "How has this concept been used before?" That is the way Revelation is structured. It is using symbols and concepts that are common to the Bible elsewhere. This is the principle which is known as interpreting Scripture with Scripture.

So, the 24 priests of the Old Testament priesthood gathered together as a group, and they were a representative group of a larger group. So, applying this principle, we come here to this picture that John sees – 24 elders seated on 24 thrones surrounding the throne of God. We may apply the same concept: that this group of 24 must be representative of a larger group of people. Since these elders wear the victors' crowns of rewards, it indicates that they have already been judged before the tribulation period has taken place, which is about ready to be described. So, here they have been judged and rewarded before the tribulation.

The Jewish believers of the Old Testament are not judged before the tribulation. They are judged at the end of the tribulation. I'm talking about the born-again Jewish believers. They are not part of the body of Christ. They are not included in the "bema" judgment. They are not included in the rapture. They are raised at the end of the tribulation, and they are included in the judgment that is totally separate from that of the believers. So, this could not be any reference to Old Testament Jewish believers who come into the picture at the end of the tribulation. They are not represented by these elders, although the Jews also had the concept of elders – the authority of rulership and leadership in spiritual things.

Rather, I think that these 24 elders are best viewed as representative of the whole body of Christ (the church), which is judged at the "bema" – the Judgment Seat of Christ, before the tribulation. These 24 elders are representing the concept of a group who represents the larger group. The larger group here is the church, because only the church is raptured; only the church is in heaven here in Revelation 4; and, only they are eligible for rewards – not saved Israel, which comes into the picture later on.

These white garments, of course, are the very things that Revelation 3:5 previously referred to when speaking to the church in Sardis: "He that overcomes (the born-again person), the same shall he be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name of the book of life," and so on. These white garments that are promised in Revelation 3:5 are referring to ultimate sanctification. That gives us the clue as to what the white garments mean on these elders. These elders, representing the totality of the body of Christ, tell us that here in heaven are all believers of the church age from Pentecost to the rapture, and they have experienced now ultimate sanctification. That means that the sin nature has been removed from the genetic structure of their bodies. That means that their physical bodies have been completely restored to perfection. That means that they can no longer sin. That means that they have absolute holiness, in fact. They actually possess it. This is actually characteristic of them. And they constantly act in their souls (all expressions of their souls: their minds; their wills; and, their emotions) completely in compatibility with the holiness of God. So, the white gowns refer to the ultimate sanctification which all believers look forward to as someday experiencing in heaven.

**Apostles**

The concept of the elders is a very fitting one to represent the body of Christ, because the elder is the key personality in the church age organization. But in order to understand that, we very briefly need to go back to the time when there were apostles on the face of the earth. There are no apostles here today. Only certain arrogant denominational groups claim the thing that they call apostolic authority; apostolic succession; and, so on. For a person to be able to hold the gift and the office of an apostle, he had to be an eyewitness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, when the Pope says that he's an apostle, and that he appoints other apostles, just let him have his fun, and enjoy his good time, and don't get all hot about it. Just conclude that you're safe in assuming that the Pope has not seen Christ in His resurrection, and neither have any of those priests that he is appointing as apostles.

The role of the apostle was very distinct, however, in the New Testament church. On the day of Pentecost, the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ sent God the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell all believers, and to provide them with certain spiritual gifts for their service. John 14:16; John 16:7; and, Ephesians 4:7-11 all describe God the Holy Spirit coming to the earth on Pentecost to provide spiritual gifts for believers. Among those was the gift of apostleship, which was designed to enable one to establish local churches. That was the point of being an apostle. The necessity for that gift was the supernatural ability to plant and established local church congregations. The apostle, therefore, was responsible for the churches which he established. He was their spiritual guide and he was their judge.

Notice that I am speaking in terms of churches (plural), for an apostle had the authority over many churches. Those that he established were under his care, and they were under his spiritual authority. The apostles then appointed elders for these various churches. Acts 14:23 teaches us that. These elders were appointed to rule, and to teach in the local congregation during the absence of the apostle. So, the apostle was the supreme authority over several churches. During his absence, there was an authority appointed by the apostle who was in the form of an elder, who was the authority governing and ruling in the local congregation. The apostle appointed his personal delegates, who themselves had authority to handle disputes in the churches, and to communicate appropriate New Testament doctrine to these churches. We have several Scriptures that speak about apostles sending their delegates to handle these matters: 1 Corinthians 16:10-1; 2 Corinthians 7:13-15; 2 Corinthians 8:16-24; and, Titus 1:5. All of these passages are dealing with the fact that the apostle even ruled at a distance by sending agents to handle certain circumstances.

The founding apostles also wrote specific New Testament epistles to their churches to handle problems, and to communicate church age doctrine to these congregations. Some of these letters came to be included in our New Testament, and became the New Testament Scriptures. But the reason those letters were written was the apostle exercising his authority, writing to one of his churches, to straighten out certain things, and to instruct them in certain doctrinal facets that they needed to know. Each apostle had his particular area of responsibility, and his particular group of churches. Galatians 2:7 and 2 Corinthians 11:28 indicate that.

The role of the apostle, as we have indicated, was not passed on to other men. Only God the Holy Spirit, of course, can bestow this gift, and He can only bestow it (the Scripture indicates) to one who was an eyewitness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, that boxes it in. Unless you were an eyewitness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, you could not be an apostle. That's why Paul had to see the risen price on the Damascus road in his experience, so that he could say, "I've seen Jesus Christ alive." Therefore, he was qualified to be an apostle. But then God the Holy Spirit had to give him the gift of an apostle.

**Spiritual Gifts**

I've been in charismatic meetings where I've heard Christians stand up and ask the congregation, "Please pray for me, that I may have the gift of this or the gift of that. I heard a man who was a medical doctor one time say, "I want to expand my practice, and I am asking you to pray that God would give me the gift of healing." Well, that's not too bad of a gift for a doctor to have a medical doctor to have, but he obviously was disoriented to the means by which spiritual gifts are secured. You don't ask for a gift. You don't pay for a spiritual gift. That's utter nonsense. It's blasphemy. This is an area that the Bible makes very clear – that God the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual abilities sovereignly. You don't go to Him and ask for those gifts. What you do go to Him for is to ask Him what gift (or gifts) He has given you. You identify those particular nine spiritual abilities that are the bases that constitute Christian service today, so that you know the direction of your personal ministry. It's important to know the gifts, but it's important to realize that you do not secure a gift because you particularly decide that you would like to have that gift.

This gift of complete spiritual authority possessed by an apostle over a group of local churches ceased when the last apostle died. That was John, who wrote the book of the Revelation. When John died, the apostolic gift phased out with him. There has not been an apostle on the face of the earth since John. There has not been a man who possessed the gift of apostle since John died. Therefore, there has not been a human being who has the authority over many churches since John died. That is a travesty, such as the Roman Catholic Church practices, and other denominations which have followed in the Catholic tradition. That is not the New Testament order. When John died, the apostolic gift ceased.

The apostolic gift was no longer necessary after John died because the canon of Scripture was completed. So, the foundation for the church had been laid. 1 Corinthians 13:8-12; Ephesians 2:20; and, Hebrews 2:3-4 indicate to us that the foundation for the church was laid now, because the Bible (the New Testament Bible) was completed. Therefore, there is no such thing as apostolic succession today. One man cannot pass that gift on to another.

But the apostles, of course, knew that they were going to be phased out. Therefore, they had the foresight to begin making plans for what was going to happen after they were gone. So, they arranged for the structure of a local church organization which was going to function after they were off the scene. We have, from Pentecost to Patmos, a period of gradual transition from apostolic authority to elder authority. The apostles' authority in revelations from God was to be replaced by the authority of a completed canon of Scripture (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). The apostle had authority because God was communicating directly to him in a variety of ways. After the apostles were phased out, the authority of the elder resided in the fact that he had a New Testament Scripture, which revelation was recorded in inerrant, written form and was now completed.

So, the apostles' authority of administration over many churches then was replaced by a structure of authority which was resident in each local church independently. That's why we speak of the local church as an autonomous organization. Berean Memorial Church cannot tell First Baptist Church what to do in its congregation; First Baptist Church cannot tell Second Baptist Church what to do in its congregation; and the Second Baptist Church has no influence over a Third Baptist Church. Every church is independent in its operation, and it is within that congregation that the authority of governing that church lays.

So, the apostles' authority over many churches was replaced by individual autonomous local churches. Within the autonomous local church, the rule, or the authority of leadership, was now vested in the elder-bishop. 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:2; and, Hebrews 13:7-17 all referred to the authority of the elder-bishop.

The congregation itself became the deciding governing body. That is the highest authority now in the local church – not an apostle, but the local group of believers. That local group of believers can remove a pastor-teacher-bishop from authority in the local church, as 1 Timothy 5:19 indicates. Men within a local group of believers might aspire to the ministry of elder-bishop (1 Timothy 3:1). The Bible says that that's a good thing. They recognize their spiritual gift of pastor-teacher, and the congregation is to confirm and recognize that they have that gift. In times when a pastor moves off the scene, the pulpit of a church is vacant for one reason or another. One of the most desirable ways of filling that pulpit is by looking within the congregation and saying, "Here, God has prepared and raised up this man to now assume the elder role of leadership within the congregation." In any case, the congregation itself is the final voice.

False doctrine and false practices were now to be handled by the local church involved, and not by a group of churches with some outside super-bishop authority. The Bible is full of indications that the church handles its own problems (1 Corinthians 5:47; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Galatians 6:1; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10; and Jude 20-23).

In the last epistles of the New Testament, which were written by the apostle John, it is interesting to note that he avoids the term "apostle," and he stresses the term "elder." For example, this is the case in 2 John 1 and 3 John 1. I think it is very instructive that we observe that John, the last of the apostles near the end of his life, is writing letters that are among the final to be included in the New Testament, and he is now indicating the transition from apostolic authority to local pastor-teacher authority. So, the progress of New Testament revelation reflects the fact that the apostles envisioned an independent, congregational, local church government after they had departed in death.

The congregation has the power to invest a man with elder-bishop authority within its own local congregation. They are empowered to ordain him; that is, to recognize him as the one that God has chosen to lead that congregation. The congregation has ultimate authority in a local church organization, and they have been delegated that power by Jesus Christ to appoint, or even to remove, the elder-bishop-pastor (1 Timothy 5:19). It is the voting members of the congregation who are the stockholders in that local body and, through the elder-bishop-pastor, they exercise their authority which they have delegated to him.

**The Role of the Pastor-Teacher**

That brings us to the role of the elder bishop, because this is what has been so perverted by the devil. A lot of Christians, when they have to find a church, don't really know how to go looking for a church. Part of the reason that they're uncertain is because they don't understand what they should look for in terms of the pulpit. If they understood that organizational factor alone, it would preserve them from making a lot of serious mistakes.

**A Single Elder vs. Multiple Elders in a Local Church**

That brings us to the concept of the single or the plural elders. How many elders are there in a local church? First of all, let's put this up front: There is no Scripture in the New Testament, which, in so many words, commands either a single elder ruling in a local church, or a plurality of elder bishops ruling in a local church. There is not one single verse in the New Testament that says one elder or several elders. So, let's put that aside, and not pretend that there's some easy way that we can determine that. The issue has, therefore, to be decided from the practice of the early church, as recorded in the New Testament, and from the conditions (the isagogics – the background conditions) of the time.

**Sunday as the Day of Worship**

So, why do we come to church on Sunday instead of Saturday? There is not one single verse in the Bible that says, "Do not go to church on Saturday, the Sabbath day, but go to church on Sunday for your worship gathering." This we conclude because of the practice of New Testament Christians. This we conclude because of the isagogical background information of the times. That's how we determine that. We determine practices within the local church organizations legitimately in the same way.

Any Scripture verse that you may read that sounds like it's saying there are multiple elders in a local church can also be understood just as easily when looked at in the proper way as indicating a single elder in several local churches in the area.

Ancient cities were generally small, but the great commercial centers, such as Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus were very large, even by today's standards. They were large in territory, and they were extremely large in population. You must understand that. We were talking about the church in Ephesus. What is the church in Ephesus? Was it a little town of 300 people? No, the city of Ephesus was a town of thousands of people, and hundreds of Christians.

We have a very large church in the (DFW) metropolitan area. It seats something like 3,500 people, and it has 20,000 members. Of course, that tells you something. If I had a church that seated 3,500, and I had 20,000 members, I sure would keep that quiet. That is an insult to the preacher, and it is a disgrace to the congregation, because you know what that means, don't you? That means that they only expect a handful of their members ever to attend church. If only a handful of my members attended church regularly, I would really be discouraged. I mean, that's kind of an insult. I mean, what is 3,500 from 20,000? That's an awful lot of people who don't feel that it's necessary to come to church to hear you. That's an awful lot of people who feel they can just make it wonderfully with the boob tube or something else to fill out their religious life.

This is not a condition that existed in the New Testament church. The New Testament Christians did not stay away from the public worship services. That was their lifeline, because they had learned from the organizational structure of the apostles; they had learned from the instruction of the New Testament Scriptures; and, they had learned from the guidance of the Lord that the lifeline of the local individual Christian was that public gathering of the saints for instruction; for fellowship in the Lord's Supper; and, for praying together. That triad was the support upon which the whole structure stood. And if you undermined that instructional program which takes place in the local church, then the whole thing collapsed, which is exactly what the devil has done. One of Satan's ways of undermining and collapsing that is bringing in this idea that there is a plurality of elders in a single congregation.

So, we're going to begin next time with an analysis of what the Bible has to say concerning the executive head of a local church, the pastor-teacher-elder, and the descriptions of that in the Word of God: who he is; what he is; and, what he is supposed to do. We will look at the indications of Scripture, and see whether that role is played by many different people, or whether it is played by one person whom the congregation has authorized to represent it, and who has been recognized as possessing the commensurate pastor-teacher gift, and the ability to communicate doctrinal instruction. Your understanding of this will give you a clearer appreciation for what John was seeing for these elders that he saw sitting at that time around that throne. These were the elders that represented the totality of the body of Christ. And the reason that he referred to elders was that each of them represented a segment (a local church) of the body of Christ. As with the Jewish priests of old, the 24 represented a segment of the body, and represented together the totality of that body. So, the picture was identically drawn of *an* elder representing *a* single church. We will get on with that next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1982

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