

“How Should Elders Be Appointed in the Church?”

In the biblical point of view who is supposed to appoint a person to become an elder? Is it the pastor, the board of elders or the congregation?

First, let me recommend an excellent resource on the topic of leaders and leadership in the church. Dr. Gene Getz has written a book titled *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* (Moody Press, 2003). It is his view, and mine, that God has given us considerable freedom in how we govern our local congregations, both in organizational structure and in the number and the appointment method of elders/leaders. Far less flexible, or perhaps I should say far more important is the character and maturity required for someone to be considered qualified to be a leader in the church.

The Bible uses two terms interchangeably to describe the leadership position in the early church. In the earliest days of the church, the Greek term *presbuteroi* (elder) was consistently used. This is the same Greek word used by the Jews to describe elders within the Jewish community. By the time of Christ, every Roman city with a significant number of Jews had a council called the Sanhedrin composed of twenty-three elders. There was also a “Great Sanhedrin” in Jerusalem comprised of priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. Although the term “elder” was borrowed from the Jewish community, the role of “elder” in the church was quite different from an “elder” in the Jewish faith. Later, the term *episkopoi* (overseer/bishop) is used by the Bible to describe leaders. This term was more familiar to Gentile believers. The Romans used the title to refer to a superintendent or leader of a colony. When there were both Jewish and Gentile believers present, the Bible uses both terms (elder and overseers) to

signify the leadership function.

The key is not the term used, but the function that these men served in the church. How these men were selected also varied. In some cases they were chosen directly by Paul and Barnabas. Timothy and Titus are given instructions by Paul regarding how they were to select elders and what qualifications were to be used. Apollos is another example of one who most likely appointed elders/overseers in the churches. Beyond these early examples of Apostolic appointment by Paul and those he approved of, we have no clear model for the selection process. Both the appointment method by existing leaders and forms of congregational selection coexisted into the future. There are some indications that self-appointed leaders existed in the early church as well. Titus 1:11 mentions an example of a leader that was causing problems by teaching things he ought not to teach.

I believe that both appointed and congregationally chosen methods are permissible as long as the qualifications for elder/overseer are taken seriously. The form of selection and the name or title given leaders is secondary to the function that they are to perform.

Don Closson

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“Is It OK to Smoke the Herb of Genesis 1:29?”

“And God said, behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth...” (Gen. 1:29)

Does this mean that this herb is OK for Christians? And I am talking about the herb that you smoke.

Dear friend,

Consider the context of your question within the whole verse:

Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; *it shall be food for you. . .*" (Gen 1:29)

God gives Adam and Eve seed-yielding plants and fruit trees for *food*. The herbs are for eating, not smoking.

Consider this also: the eternal principle behind the biblical command not to be drunk (Eph 5:18) is that we are not to become intoxicated with anything that would deprive us of self-control and the ability to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit. Getting high is wrong for the same reason getting drunk is wrong.

Secondly, marijuana is illegal. Smoking weed is also wrong because the government—which is God's instrument (Rom. 13)—has laws against it.

Additionally, consider this: smoking *anything* harms your lungs. We are commanded to be good stewards of all that God has put in our hands (Gen. 1:28), which includes our bodies. And we are furthermore instructed to glorify God in our body, which is not our own: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Cor 6:19-20) 1 Cor 10:31 says, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. If getting drunk is a sin, how does one get high to the glory of God?"

So no. Any kind of herb that you would smoke is not OK.

“You Are Sending the Wrong Message to People About Dealing with Flawed Parents”

Ms. Bohlin,

Your answer to e-mail [“How Do You Honor Deeply Flawed Parents?”](#) sends the wrong messages to readers. Despite dysfunctionality in the family one cannot be superficial to the very people that raised you. You seem to be saying “be nice” but don’t really mean it:

“To give them honor means showing (not necessarily feeling) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!)”

In short, you are implying deception in hiding one’s true feelings. How can people be compassionate to the world if they are lying to themselves about their true feelings toward their parents? That is truly deceptive.

“And please remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it’s entirely possible that you can release the woundings you sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don’t deserve your trust.”

This statement is ungodly. This only allows for the heart to be confused and the heart will always be divided. Families will break up and more and more Americans will distance themselves from the family unit. Perhaps you need to carefully read the scriptures again. You are encouraging a false self and pretending to care for people even if one doesn't mean it. A human being must resolve the conflict and openly discuss what the issues are. Communication is essential in discussing problems.

Sorry, your helpful advice will only mislead people. You should suggest spiritual counseling for families. Unresolved issues lead to further breakup of the family unit. Parents are disconnected with their children and grandchildren. Please see that you correct your article with productive help.

Perhaps you haven't observed the horrendous woundings that deeply flawed parents can inflict on their children. Consider my friend Ann, whose father began raping her at age two and then invited his friends to have their way with her as well, all through her childhood. I suggest that being superficial with her father is the only way she can deal with a man who refuses to acknowledge and repent of his unspeakable sins against her.

I would suggest that being civil and cordial instead of erupting into a screaming tirade of anger and pain IS showing honor. Hiding one's true feelings can be a mark of maturity and wisdom. If you are feeling very grumpy and critical of someone that doesn't deserve it, hiding your feelings behind a choice to be civil is indeed loving and kind.

I don't think either of these cases are about lying to oneself about your feelings. It is choosing a higher road of self-control rather than giving into expressions of fleshly or tortured feelings.

I believe that God has given us great grace in His principle

of Romans 12:18: “As far as it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with all men.” Some people make it impossible to live at peace with them because of their hard, unrepentant hearts, so one needs to protect oneself with emotional distance. You cannot resolve issues in a family unless everyone is willing. The person who asked the original question was talking about dealing with people unwilling to be humble and transparent enough to resolve the consequences of their flawed nature and behavior.

I hope this helps you understand my position better. I must stand by my statements.

Sue Bohlin

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“How Do You Honor Deeply Flawed Parents?”

I am very interested in reading about how to resolve “Honor thy father and mother” with the fact that these people may have had huge and damaging flaws. Where can I read about that?

You might Google the phrase “honoring your parents” for some insight. Below are some links I hope you find helpful.

But first, let me say that one aspect of honoring flawed parents is to understand that the best (or even only) way you might be able to honor them is from a distance, emotionally and physically. You can give yourself permission to do that.

To give them honor means showing (not necessarily *feeling*) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering

what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!) To give them honor means being civil and kind in your dealings with them. It does not mean trusting them. It does not mean placing yourself in harm's way. It means forgiving them, so that you are not carrying and paying for the emotional baggage of their treatment of you. And please remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it's entirely possible that you can release the woundings you sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don't deserve your trust.

Honoring flawed parents means you have healthy boundaries so that you know where you end and they begin. It means you learn how to protect yourself so that they can't steamroll over you; it also means you have realistic expectations about what they can and cannot give you or do for/to you. (You may need some help adjusting your expectations.) For instance, in our family there is a family member who has never, ever said the words "thank you." I mean, not even if you pass the salt, or do something they specifically asked! (I think this qualifies as "flawed," don't you?) It is unrealistic to expect that to change. It is an exercise in futility to expect anything different than a lifelong pattern of non-communication. Honoring this person means letting go of the futile hope to ever hear something as simple as "thank you," much less the more profound "I'm proud of you" or even "I love you"! Honoring this person means letting go of unrealistic expectations so we don't set ourselves up for continued disappointment and heartache. (An excellent book is *Boundaries* by Drs. John Townsend and Henry Cloud.)

Finally, let me share with you the insight of Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy*:

To honor our parents means to be thankful for for their existence and to respect their actual role as givers of life in the sequence of human existence. Of course in order to honor them in this way we need to be thankful for our own

existence too. But we also will usually need to have pity on them. For, even if they are good people, it is almost always true that they have been quite wrong in many respects, and possibly still are.

Commonly those who have experienced great antagonism with their parents are only able to be thankful for their existence and honor them, as they deeply need to, after the parents have grown old. Then it is possible to pity them, to have mercy on them. And that opens the door to honoring them. With a certain sadness, perhaps, but also with joy and peace at least. One of the greatest gifts of The Kingdom Among Us is the healing of the parent-child relation, “turning the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:6).

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

Honor My Mother And Father? How Should I Treat My Abusive Parents?

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/questions/parentingandfamily/honormymotherandfather.html>

What Does It Mean to Honor Your Parents? (in this case, when a parent has dementia)

http://www.newhopenow.com/ask/honor_parents.html

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See Also:

[“You Are Sending the Wrong Message to People About Dealing with Flawed Parents”](#)

“What’s a Good Evangelism Training Curriculum?”

Can you recommend any curriculum I could use to train young people in evangelism?

I think one of the best evangelism training out there is [“Becoming a Contagious Christian”](#) by Willow Creek. “Evangelism Explosion” (www.eeinternational.org/) is also another very good tool.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

“How Can I Share the Gospel with Jehovah’s Witnesses?”

How can I deal most effectively with Jehovah Witnesses? I specifically want insights on how to really reach the hearts of these dear people. I am not interested in just winning an argument, but would like to present the Gospel in a way that will make an impact.

I commend you for seeking to reach those lost in the JW organization. Yes indeed, our goal is not to win an argument but to win them to Christ.

The best thing we can do is study the scriptures diligently and ask them questions regarding the nature of Christ and the

integrity of the organization. The key is to get them to start asking questions and start seeking the answers. When JW's run into a Christian who knows his/her Bible, they often seek answers from the elders. When the elders cannot answer, they often try to find the answers on their own, reading the Bible for the first time without the Watchtower magazines. As they seek and look for answers, many come to find that the JW Jesus is not the God of the Bible. This takes a while but with patience and perseverance, it will one day bear fruit. So the key is to get them to start asking questions about the Bible and their organization. Keep on witnessing, brother. We'll be praying for you here at Probe.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

“Is God Punishing Me Because I Committed the Unforgiveable Sin?”

I enjoy your website a great deal, and have especially found comfort in the Probe Answer to E-mail [“I Fear I Have Committed the Unforgiveable Sin.”](#)

I, much like person who wrote in, have been assailed by doubts and fears that I've blasphemed the Holy Spirit. I've read so many things indicating that I haven't, but I've had a hard time accepting them. I recall a specific time in my life that I (for no reason) wanted to push God's limit. Knowing there was a blasphemy against the Spirit, I tested and cursed (in my

head) God. After a while of this (and I didn't want to do any of these things—they came out of nowhere—or just my sinful nature, perhaps), I started reading the scriptures dealing with this sin and wondering, "What if Satan's really behind Jesus and His miracles? What if Satan has fooled us all into believing in God, but it's all a joke?" Immediately after thinking these things, I just knew I had blasphemed the Spirit by calling God Satan.

While I'm also aware that other scriptures don't carry the disclaimer, "unless you commit the unpardonable sin," I fear that it still applies, since Jesus Himself made this sin the one exception. Just because it isn't always there in a disclaimer doesn't seem to make it null and void, in my opinion. In addition, I feel that my concern doesn't really prove my innocence. A lot of times, people say that the fact that I'm concerned means God is working with me, but could it be that God has left me, and my own conscience is torturing me? Or maybe it's Satan, telling me, "You can never be saved now! You're through!" Perhaps it IS God working with me, but He isn't offering forgiveness. Maybe, as part of my punishment, He's calling me—dangling that carrot of salvation out in front of me, while also saying, "You've gone too far—you can't be saved!" Why is there no evidence that He did it with the Pharisees, if this is the case? Maybe He did! Or, given their personalities, maybe it would be worse punishment for them to build more and more power, just to see it crumble when they reach Hell. With my sensitive conscience, perhaps the greater punishment would be to torment me here AND in Hell.

Is there any way you might be able to clear this up for me? My girlfriend, who is a Christian, says there's no way God would send someone to Hell for having weird thoughts, and I desperately want to agree with her. But we all, as sinners, deserve Hell to begin with...so I'm very torn. Every time I feel safe from worry, I start over-analyzing and talking my way out

of assurance...

"Everything can be forgiven, but you've rejected the last appeal.." vs. "Everything can be forgiven, but you've gone too far!!"

Dear _____,

Bless your heart. Satan really has been playing mind games with you, hasn't he? What a dirty rotten liar and skunk.

Please remember that God loves you, MUCH more than you have the capacity to receive or even imagine. Please remember that He understands just how fallen your intellect and your conscience is (as is the case for ALL of us). Please remember that He fully knows that we can only "see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12 KJV) on this side of eternity. Therefore, He completely understands that we're going to jump to faulty conclusions because we have faulty thinking, and He has more grace to extend to you than you can possibly experience.

I think growing older will help you with this. Once you are married and you are a father, you will understand the heart of God toward you much more than you can now. You will know that God passionately loves you and will do just about anything to help you know Him and understand Him and ENJOY Him. As a father, you won't want to play mind games with your children or dangle carrots in front of them—your love will blow those kinds of thoughts away.

Instead of trying to explain away all the mental gymnastics you've been going through to wrack yourself with doubt over the fear of committing the unforgiveable sin, I'm going to make a very serious suggestion: that you pray every day, for three months at least, "Lord, teach me that You love me." Look for the ways He will answer that prayer. (And He will!)

And then write me back and let's see where you are in your

spiritual life.

I really mean this, _____.

Sue Bohlin

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“What Do You Think of ‘The Purpose Driven Life’ by Rick Warren?”

None of us here at Probe have any cautions or reservations about it.

Personally, I think it has become so popular because Rick Warren has taken “Basic Christian Living” principles and put them all in one place, in a highly accessible format. One of the best things about the book is its first sentence: “It’s not about you.” So his starting point is that the Christian life, the purpose-driven life, is about giving glory to God. It’s not about personal fulfillment or self-actualization—it’s all about God. That puts everything else into proper perspective.

The fact that this book appeals to both believers and unbelievers is exciting to me, because we are all hungry for truth and this book has it. It is steeped through and through with Scripture, and it’s well written.

Sue Bohlin

“Will God Punish Me Forever for My Mistakes?”

I am so depressed right now because I feel all the mistakes in my past mistakes are so many that I won't have a good future.

I'm 29 years old and I had 2 abortions before I was 20. Two years ago I slept with my boyfriend even though I was already a Christian; we went our separate ways because of this. (He's also a Christian.) I have been single ever since and I have been told that I am being punished for all my sins. Does this mean because of what happened in my past I will never find peace, joy or fulfillment? Does this mean God will never trust me with a relationship again? Will I have to pay for the rest of my life?

Will He refuse to forgive me since I made the mistakes when I was already a Christian? I have been so tormented by all this and I am in constant pain—my heart aches. I really don't know what to do, I have prayed and asked for forgiveness, don't know what else to do. All I feel is guilt, guilt, guilt.

Oh, you precious girl! I have such wonderful news for you!! Your flesh and Satan have been doing a number on you, pouring guilt and self-condemnation onto you all this time . . .when God has been standing there, extending grace and mercy and complete forgiveness to you, wanting you to receive it, but you haven't been able to see it.

How do I know this?

Because of “the Christian's bar of soap,” 1 John 1:9—“If we confess our sins [and you have, over and over and over, right?], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to

cleanse us of all unrighteousness." Note that God does two things when we confess: 1) He forgives us, which means He sends them away forever, and 2) He cleanses us of ALL unrighteousness, making our souls clean and pure as snow. What's missing for you is the decision to consciously RECEIVE His forgiveness and cleansing.

Are you being punished for your sins? Well, consider this: there is a difference between punishment, which includes wrath being poured out on us, and the consequences of our choices, which is loving discipline. Romans 8:1 says that there is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because the Lord Jesus took all of the Father's condemnation on Himself on the cross. So God is not punishing you. Are you experiencing consequences for your sinful choices? Maybe in the beginning. But from what you describe to me, with peace, joy, and fulfillment eluding you, it sounds like you have your cup upside down, which is preventing you from receiving any new blessings from God because of the mistaken belief that you are still under condemnation.

No, beloved sister, you will not have to pay for the rest of your life. What God wants is repentance, and you have already done that. Scripture says that godly sorrow leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10), but there is a worldly sorrow, fed by our own flesh or by demonic forces in temptation, that leads to death. And that's where you've been living, hasn't it? Camped out in a living death?

I would love to lead you in a prayer to receive God's forgiveness and cleansing. May I also suggest that you do something physical to make it more real: lift up your arms, palms up, like a small child ready to be picked up by her daddy: *Dear Father, I want to turn my cup right-side up and receive all the forgiveness and cleansing You have for me. I make a choice today to open my heart to You and let You love me, let You forgive me, let You cleanse me from all unrighteousness. Thank You for exchanging my sin for Jesus' righteousness.*

Thank You that Your word is true, that because I have confessed my sins, You are faithful and just to forgive me of my sins and cleanse me of all unrighteousness. I receive it in Jesus' name.

From here on out, every time the old feelings of condemnation and guilt pop up (and they will, because they have become a habit), go back to the Father and thank Him again for forgiving you and cleansing you, and tell Him, "I do not accept those false feelings of condemnation and guilt, but I do receive Your grace, and thank You for loving me, Abba!" It may take awhile for your feelings to catch up with the truth of your decision to receive God's grace, but that's OK. They will. Feelings follow beliefs and actions like a caboose follows the engine of a train.

The Lord bless you this day, _____, and I pray that you will hear the love in your Father's voice and see the love in His eyes as you receive His truth through this email!

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

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"Help—My Daughter Just Attempted Suicide"

My 19-year-old daughter has been hospitalized because she has tried to commit suicide. This has not only created a moment of crisis with in our immediate family but a very big puzzling question. Why would a person who professes to believe in

Christ attempt to commit suicide? What should I say to her? How can I tell her that Christ is bigger than any of her problems may be?

Please know that I will be praying for your daughter and your family in this difficult time.

Teenagers are universally having a difficult time sorting out their lives in this new millennium. There are so many competing pressures and influences that they easily get overwhelmed. While suicide is indeed a drastic measure, it is more common today among our youth than ever before.

If your daughter is a believer, as you suggest, she might be wondering where is God in her life and circumstances. She may have a false expectation that knowing God should make everything better. While Proverbs makes clear that we are better off living with wisdom and insight, there are no guarantees against trouble. In fact Jesus warned that we would have tribulation in our lives. We can often see the ungodly and wicked succeeding in life and wonder why we should bother doing things right. Asaph wondered the same thing in Psalm 73. Check out my article on [Where Was God on 9/11?](#) for an exposition of this important Psalm.

She may also rationalize that heaven will be a far better place than earth and why not get there sooner if her life seems impossible for whatever reason. This logic is hard to refute especially since we believe in the eternal security of the believer. Suicide does not forfeit your place in heaven if you are a true child of the King.

If she is not truly a believer then she needs the hope only He can bring. Images of the Good Shepherd from Psalm 23 and John 10 (especially verses 9, 11, 14, 15, 27, 28, and 29) can be very helpful to someone struggling to make their way in this messy world. The entire Gospel of John may be a good project for the two of you to read together.

So what do you say? First, you assure her of your love and commitment to her no matter what she has done. As her father, you carry the major load in communicating your love and acceptance of her no matter her failures or perceived inadequacies. You must depend on the Lord to allow you to see her through Jesus' eyes.

Second, she needs to understand that God is sovereign and has planned out her life. In our relationship with Him we need to seek His wisdom and guidance not our own. Things may look bad now but she can't see her life ahead as the Lord does. There is a reason for everything even when it doesn't make sense to us. She may not be ready to trust God with her life yet but she needs to know you trust God with her life.

Third, there is undoubtedly some deep seated need or hurt in her life that causes her to disrespect herself so much. She will likely need counseling to uncover this. But she will need your support through the entire process. You may need to face a failure on your own part in her life that you are unaware of. You have to be willing to face whatever it takes to bring her back to wholeness. For awhile you will need to supply the courage she needs to face every day. You can't do this in your own strength. Remember Isaiah 40:31:

But those who hope in (or wait upon) the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary
they will walk and not be faint.

Take courage, for your Savior has overcome the world and there is nothing impossible to Him.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ray Bohlin

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