

“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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**“What Do Mormons Mean When
They Say Jesus Is Our Big**

Brother?"

I have two questions. I know that when Mormons say Jesus is our big brother, they take it literally. What do they mean by that? Second, what is the best way to witness to my Mormon friend?

First, Mormons believe that Jesus is our literal brother in the sense that we existed with him prior to our incarnation on earth. They believe that we all (Jesus included) existed prior to our bodily form as spirit children of Elohim and God the Mother. In fact, prior to this spiritual state, Mormons believe that we have existed for eternity past as intelligences. The only difference between Jesus and us is that he has been more faithful and useful to the father. This all makes more sense when you realize that in the Mormon system there is only one form of sentient or intelligent life; God the father, the Son, the angels, and mankind are all of the same species. It looks something like this:

Intelligences → spirit beings → incarnate (fleshly) beings → god

Mormonism teaches that all of us are on this path of progression toward existing as a god.

Regarding your desire to inform your friend about the Christian faith, another good resource is the book *How Wide the Divide* by Blomberg AND Robinson. It is a dialogue between a professor at Brigham Young University and a seminary professor from Denver Seminary. It is very informative and it provides a good example for how Christians and Mormons can enter into dialogue with one another.

For Him,

Don Closson

“I Object to Your Article on Genesis Unbound”

I came across [your review](#) of the book *Genesis Unbound*. The article wasn't written as a way to see a parallelism in Genesis 1-3; it presents a substitute “Interpretation” of Genesis 1-3. It in fact totally misses an even bigger problem which this view causes: the worldwide flood.

I'm not saying that Mr. Milne hasn't a right to state his views. I am questioning its consistency with Probe's past overall Biblical worldview. It is questionable as an article representative of Probe.

I regret that you had such a negative reaction to Rich Milnes' review of John Sailhammer's book. The controversy over the age of the earth within the church is a critical discussion that often gets lost in people protecting their territory more than seeking the truth and being open to a different approach.

As Probe's main science speaker I still refer to Sailhammer's work not because I necessarily agree with his conclusions but because I think he challenged the underlying assumptions of both young- and old-earth creationists. If there is ever going to be an in-house resolution to this controversy, works such as Sailhammer's will need to be discussed openly and critically. That never really happened, unfortunately.

Please read Milnes' closing paragraph again:

You will have to read all of Dr. Sailhammer's provocative book to make up your own mind. But at least give him the

chance to make his case directly from the text. Genesis Unbound is a book to stir your thinking, and should be read slowly. But go back and read Genesis to be reminded of God's greatness in His creation.

Rich (as well as I) simply thought it was a provocative work that deserved wider attention and response. If you haven't read the book, then I would ask that you suspend judgment on Sailhammer until you do. (Though I admit the book would be hard to find now.)

Thank you for your participation with us and for writing.

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“Was God Silent Between Cain and Noah?”

One of her reasons my Wiccan friend gives for turning away from Christianity is that God was silent after dealing with Cain and Abel up to the time of Noah and the flood. For nearly two thousand years pagan civilizations thrived, say in Sumeria and Mesopotamia. Where was this monotheistic God at this time in history? In her mind this God is uninvolved and therefore heartless for bringing a flood. Where in the Bible does it say God was involved with man during this time?

God was indeed involved in the affairs of His creation between the time of Cain and Abel and the Flood. The clearest example of His involvement (in a clearly miraculous sense) can be found in Genesis 5:24 “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (see also Heb. 11:5). Clearly, such an event requires Divine intervention.

Obviously, this one example is enough to prove God's involvement in the affairs of men and the world between the time of Cain and Abel and the Flood. But God is actually constantly involved in the affairs of the world. In the first place, the world only exists because God created it (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16; etc.). And the universe is continuously upheld in existence by the word and power of God (Heb. 1:3). Thus, God's involvement with His creation is continuous. And God has revealed Himself to man not only in the Bible and Christ (special revelation), but also in creation (Psalm 19:1-4; Rom. 1:18-23), providential acts of kindness (Acts 14:17), and conscience (Rom. 2:14-15) all examples of what is called general revelation. Such revelation is also continuous and ongoing to all men, at all times, in all places.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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“t’s Not Fair to Punish People with Hell for Believing What They Were Taught to Believe”

If all people are following the teachings of what have been taught to believe, how can any be punished? By punishment, I mean that some religions (Christianity) claim that if you don't believe what they believe, you will go to hell.

Good question!

Two aspects to my answer: first, this question is coming from a man-based perspective, as if all religions were equally valid and only about what people are taught. (In other words, leaving God out of the equation.)

Philosopher J.P. Moreland gives this illustration: let's say I am with a group of people and I ask them to describe my mother. They all say, "I don't know your mother," and I say, "Go ahead and give it your best guess." One says, "52 and blue eyes and brown hair." Another says, "58 and slender, with silver hair." A third says "55, hazel eyes and blonde highlights." The problem is, they are all shots in the dark. They are nothing more than guesses. I'm the only one who knows what my mother looks like.

All religions are like that, with the exception of one. They are all shots in the dark, sheer guesses about the nature and character of God. Except for Christianity, since Jesus says He came from heaven to tell us what God is like because God is His Father. It wasn't a guess for Jesus to tell us about God, it was a reporting of fact. Which is why Christianity is bold enough to say, "This is what God is like, and all other truth claims about God are mere guesses."

The second part of my answer is that in Romans 1, God says that He has revealed enough about Himself in creation that men are without excuse:

*...because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.
(Romans 1:19-20)*

Christianity is about our broken relationship with God being reconciled and restored through Jesus Christ, and only through Jesus Christ. God has spoken to us about His relationship with

us, through His written communication (the Bible) and through His Son leaving heaven to come to earth and show us. Its true that if we try to get to God any way except through the one way He has provided—the death and resurrection of His Son—the relationship will remain broken. Which means an eternity separated from God. . . which is hell.

How is it people can be punished for not believing (actually, the Bible's language is about trusting) in Jesus? Because regardless of what religion people are taught, God has still spoken through His creation: of the earth, of the cosmos, of the moral nature of human beings. And He holds everyone accountable for responding to the evidence He planted in His creation, even if it is contradicted by the teachings of the various world religions.

It's like a teacher telling her class that there will be a test on Friday, but rumors sweep throughout the class: that the test has been cancelled, or the test will be postponed to the next week, or that tests have been done away with altogether. Regardless of what rumors students may have heard, they are still responsible for what the teacher told them.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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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.

Sue Bohlin

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“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 "Honorable 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”](#)

“Your Bethlehem Star Article is Wrong”

Your Bethlehem Star article is out of date. Check out www.BethlehemStar.net. Also, they recently discovered there were 2 Sejanuses to correct the date. Finally, check out *The Case for Christ* by Strobel.

I did indeed write the [Bethlehem Star article](#) well before Rick Larson and his Star model became better known.

However, I have come across it many times since then though I have never had the pleasure of seeing him personally.

He hasn't convinced me.

1) He is correct that the Bible indicates that stars are for signs but it is very obscure as to what kind of signs. Psalm 19 only says the heavens declare God's glory. The following verses he quotes don't change the context. God's glory is not the same as historical information.

2) The Romans 10 passage he refers to as obviously indicating that the stars communicated the “gospel” to Israel is a huge stretch for me. I just don't see how he arrives at that obvious conclusion.

3) You mention Lee Strobel's *Case for Christ* as apparently affirming something about Larson's theory. I found no references to the Star, Wise Men, or Magi. Bethlehem was only discussed as it relates to the massacre of the innocents by Herod. However what I did find was on page 101 where Strobel mentions that Herod died in 4 BC and his interviewee, John McRay from Wheaton does not correct him.

4) From my quick reskimming of the website, Larson still does not engage the very reasonable possibility that the star was the shekinah glory of God and has nothing to do with actual astronomical events. This is still the most reasonable explanation to me. Other Christian astronomers I have consulted don't give Larson's idea much credit.

5) Larson embarks on a rather naturalistic, modernist explanation that is not necessary and despite his confident proclamations otherwise, has not firmly established Herod's death in 1 B.C.

6) It's interesting to me that the quotes he gives on the website while congratulating him for his scientific and reasonable approach, no one explicitly says they agree with him. I would think that if they had said they agreed with his theory, it would be quoted on the website.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, PhD

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“The Pope’s Inflammatory Remarks about Islam”

How would you access Pope Benedict XVI remarks in his lecture on Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections? and Islamic reaction? What was the essence of his lecture that infuriated the Islamic World?

Thank you for your question regarding the Pope's comments on Islam and the resulting violent response from the Muslim

world.

Not being a Roman Catholic, I do not usually read the Pope's speeches. However, given the worldwide outrage by Muslims, I thought it important to understand what has caused such an intense reaction to his lecture at the University of Regensburg.

The speech was rather academic and mostly focused on the relationship between faith and reason in the Christian tradition. In it, the Pope gave quotes from the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II to a Persian Muslim during the siege of Constantinople in the late 14th century. The exact quote of the Emperor is "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." The Emperor went on to argue that spreading any religion by the sword is by nature unreasonable.

The irony of the situation we find ourselves in today is amazing. We now have Muslims burning churches, threatening to kill the Pope, and destroy the west, because he implied that Mohammed advocated the use of the sword to spread and protect the Muslim faith. It is equivalent to punching someone in the face because they called you pugilistic.

Muslims certainly cannot deny that Mohammed admonished Muslims to pick up their swords for Allah's cause (see my essay [Islam and the Sword](#) at Probe.org). They also cannot ignore the fact that Islam conquered both the Persian and Byzantine Empires via warfare. Had it not been for the victory at Tours by Charles Martel, all of Europe would have fallen to the Islamic invaders.

When anyone in the west speaks against violence done in the name of Allah, Muslims are quick to equate the written word with "aggression" against Islam which then justifies all sorts of violent acts in defense of Islam and its Prophet. I can

only hope that the media and our politicians will wake up to the double standard that occurs when words or ideas are equated with violent acts.

Don Closson

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