

www.oldpathspulpit.org

PRESENTS

My Personal Notes . . .

Published as time and opportunity permit, usually a few times a week.

3218 Timberland Trail, Euless Texas 76040-7727 – 817.247.6630

Ed Smithson, Editor

APPOINTMENT FOR LIFE

A Supreme Court Chief Justice, and Associate Justices, of the United States of America, according to the Constitution, are appointed for life. The only way they can vacate the office is by retirement, death, or impeachment. I think that is a mistake.

One of the reasons I think it is a mistake is that it gives rise to other lifetime appointments or the idea that one can “serve(?)” in public office for life. One of the complaints union people have with employers is that there is no “guarantee” that they can keep their job.

So the attitude of society, over the long haul, is that their jobs ought to be “secure” or “guaranteed.” Most of us who are older were not raised that way. We were told that if we didn’t like the way an employer treated us or if we just didn’t like what we were doing we could find another job.

PREACHERS AND LONGEVITY

All this has given rise to another idea, that preachers should preach for a congregation for life. A few have managed to do that. There was a time when you could count on one hand the men in the brotherhood that had spent over 20 years at one church. Not so today!

At that time men understood when they decided to preach, they could not “put down roots.” There are several reasons for this:

One, most churches were run by brethren that did not believe in long tenures of preachers. One preacher I knew decided he would move every two-year period and he did most of his life. He had a couple hundred

sermons that he preached at each place and when that was finished those he moved on. He did not do a very good job of “feeding” the church.

I also knew a congregation that did not believe in long tenures and they were not alone in that. When they got a new preacher they let him know upfront, he would stay three years, or less, and no more. Then one time they got a man they liked and approached him to stay longer and he had already made arrangement to move, remembering their policy.

Two, someone has to be the scapegoat. In a troubling situation where preachers had been “run off”, one member said, “but we have to live here and the preacher can move.” What book, chapter and verse did that come from? But it is true! It seems if there is trouble, the church can blame it on the preacher because he is gone.

Three, sometimes the leaders of the church just do not want to work at solving the problems. It is easier for someone to take the blame, guilty or not, and they can “start over.” Too many times the preacher gets into “the line of fire,” and therefore they get the blame and the preacher moves and the problem stays.

I personally have no objection to preachers staying a long time. I know a few men who have. One advantage is that they can do a better work, assuming they will stand on the truth and not compromise. I thought at one time in my life I could do that but found out that my personality would not allow it. Consequently I don’t really understand how men stay in one place for so long. I guess that is because I can’t do it.

ELDERS ARE NO EXCEPTION

I have had the good fortune to work with some good elders in my life. But there are some out there that are not so good. For some reason there are some people that “aspire” to be elders. It is a difficult and thankless job. So it is a wonder to me that so many would like to be in that position. I think perhaps they would like the “position” and not the “work.” Being God’s Shepherd is a difficult and trying job at times and not everyone is suited.

However, some of those who would like to be elders and finally get into that position think it is a “secure” job, that is, they think they should be an elder

for the rest of their lives. I have even heard elders say that they cannot be removed from the office because, “once an elder, always an elder.” There is certainly no passage of scripture I know of that would suggest that to be true.

When a judge can no longer function as a judge, he should resign. When an elder can no longer function as an elder because of health, sin or other problems in their lives they should resign. I remember one time a church that appointed an old man who was a member of the congregation to the office of elder. They knew he could not function properly but they respected him and wanted to honor him, so they appointed him an “honorary elder.” What they got was an “ornery” elder. No such appointment should ever be made.

It is my judgment that no appointment should be for life. It does not take into consideration certain issues that cannot be foreseen. Certainly there is no authority in the Bible for lifetime appointments and longevity can sometimes create problems in the church that cannot be foreseen. When we read the qualification of elders set forth in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and 1 Peter 5, there is certainly no indication that “once an elder always an elder.”

Ed Smithson

ed@oldpathspulpit.org

www.oldpathspulpit.org

February 14, 2011