



# **A Short Bible Study Note on Youth and their Elders in the Church**

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## **Introduction**

Several times since the mid-1990s I have heard the statement made by certain ones how we should just hand over the church to the youth - apparently they have all the answers and are better than the 'old grey-haired men.'

Yet the fruits of such a Leftist policy is there for anyone to see.

Consider also that these views are contrary to Church teaching and thus constitute a doctrinal change or maybe a heresy? What this short Bible study note aims to do is summarise Biblical understanding on the subject of younger men ruling over the elders and if the younger men should be ordained to the office of Elder in their 20s. This is not a large work or technical – it represents a distillation of research and enough appropriate information to be able to come to a Biblical understanding of the subject.

Of great concern is that the desire to implant youth over the elder is so strong that due process, a proper Biblical study using appropriate technical sources and methodology is not employed. A flippant approach to find a Scripture to support ones' view is exactly the sort of thing that led to the heresies and apostasy of the Church of God in the 1990s.

Do we want to emulate that again?

Here are some points to consider:

1. Nowhere does the Bible say that the youth should take the lead or be over the elder – it does not sanction the principle of the younger ruling the elder at all. Why on earth should it? This nonsense came from neo-Marxism and the 1968 revolutionaries
2. the Churches of God almost across the board have acknowledged that in the 1950s we often placed men into positions far too young which led to cockiness, arrogance, snappiness, self-will, belligerence, 'God will always back me up' attitude etc – with consequent results that were not good. Most acknowledge that
3. one claimed that in the USA youths manage much older people at work to justify their aims to place the younger over the elder in the Church – what a powerful argument – the proof we have all been seeking (I say this 'tongue in cheek'). However, some are rather disdainful of their spiritual elders, form inner circles and do not believe in so many of our doctrines. The Sabbath and Holy Days are not all there is to our doctrines. It is far more than that, yet one wouldn't know it from their conversation and sermons or sermonettes. Preaching protestant-like piffle on the Sabbath is not in keeping of the day nor is it edifying
4. as one Church member pointed out, they know very little about life or the true doctrines and their sermonettes are like Sunday School stories. Unless the sermons and sermonettes in the Churches of God are superior in content, depth and delivery to those of mainstream churches – what is the difference between us and them? Just Sabbath attendance?
5. sure, the youth should and can be trained - **but they must wait their turn and prove that they are mature elders; prove that they believe in the true doctrines and not just say that they do and then never uphold them or preach on them**

In the Synagogue, whence the New Testament Church sprang and upon which its structure was broadly based, one's ordination to the office of Eldership normally commenced in ones 50's. This office is based on age, experience, capacity and loyalty to the true doctrines.<sup>1</sup>

## Scriptures on the elderly

So should we disparage the elderly in the Church? What does the Bible (and even nature) have to say about this?

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<sup>1</sup> There is much I could write about the Church's basic structure having been based on that of the Synagogue and I still have an incomplete article on the subject and a chart - should anyone like a copy of the latter, drop me a line and I shall send it to you as it might be helpful.

**"The hoary head is a crown of glory, it shall be found in the way of righteousness."** (Prov 16:31 ESV)

"Steadfast love and faithfulness preserve the king, and by steadfast love his throne is upheld.

The glory of young men is their strength, **but the splendor of old men is their gray hair.**" (Prov 20:28-29 ESV)

**"You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man,** and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD." (Lev 19:32 ESV)

"Show respect to the elderly, and honor older people. In this way you show respect for your God. I am the Lord" (Lev 19:32 God's Word Translation)

**"Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?"** "To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his. (Job 12:12-13. Cp 15:9-11)

"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb;

**even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you.**

I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." (Is 46:3-5. Cp Ps 71:18-19 ESV)

Are we willing to abide by these Scriptures or will we ignore them, preferring instead political correctness which emanated from the 1968 Leftist uprisings?

## **Should we be 'led by the spirit'?**

Another way of thinking that has infiltrated into many of the youths' minds is that 'we should be led by the spirit.' It is true that God's spirit must lead us (Rom 8:14-17). But how?

In the context of them asserting that 'we must be led by the spirit' they mean that they don't want a properly organised structure. For instance, there may be no good works working group, or outreach group or speakers' club or social committee etc. They prefer spontaneous 'moving by the spirit' to sort of lead or even force one to do these things.

The REAL reason for many of them not wanting a structure is of course they know that if organisation means a proper, mature, stepped approach to accomplishing outcomes – they might be left out of the decision-making process or whatever is being organised will give others opportunities to serve. You see, if they have ‘gangs’ or groups they can go around influencing and organising things. If you do not belong to their group, you can be left out or isolated, no matter the talents or experience one can bring to bear.

The belief that we should be ‘led by the spirit’ is based on laziness rather than spending time to seek out the Scripture to lead us by some of them; or the wish not to have a structured approach. This is all from the Pentecostals and Evangelicals though they will not admit that, will they?

This sort of laissez faire system or style of operation is not of a Godly mind-set. For is it not rather obvious that God is organised? That He has inspired organisation everywhere?

Cannot they see that the laissez approach is fruitless, chaotic, frustrating and useless? Yet they persist on their fruitless path to keep others out of ‘serving’ and to place their friends into positions.

So much of what some organise bears no fruit and they wonder why – can’t they see that God does not bless despising the elder nor a scatter-brain approach nor not believing in and teaching our doctrines?

But a pastor would have things organised according to the Biblical method to produce a successful community. In fact, a Church group would have guidelines on how to organise a local congregation in their pastor’s manuals. Even in their contract – otherwise it would not be done.

A rather common sense step would be to provide an organisational chart containing the above work groups with this to the congregation. How else would one know how to organise anything and where it all fits together? How else to succeed?

## **What does the Bible say?**

At the Feast of Tabernacles in 2015 an elder mentioned in a sermon that elders are not priests but draw their office based on other Old Testament offices such as the elders mentioned periodically in the Bible.

In this regard, I should mention here that the belief that the Church of God was a sort of little Israel separate from the world and that ministers were Priests was dropped in the late 1960s (and this was iterated by HWA during the Ministerial Conference held January 1973).

According to Raymond F McNairs's notes dated 18 January, Herbert W Armstrong stated that:

“The Levitical priesthood analogy should not be overdone. We are ministers under the Melchizedek priesthood.”

At no time did Herbert W Armstrong ever reverse that decision and nothing can be found in any taped sermon or Bible study or in written form to the effect that he thought he or the other ministers were Priests and Levites – yet some persist with this view and its negative consequences.

Based on the changed belief that ministers are not the continuation of the Old Testament Priesthood, administrative changes begin to be made to ‘loosen up’ from 1968-73: aspects of administration and governance eg dress (inc wearing more colourful clothing to church services), no longer discouraging investing in the stock exchange or discouraging members being doctors, lawyers or actors, and opposition to vaccinations dropped; excess disciplining of children by some was curtailed etc.

Notice this: the tradition of New Testament elders comes from the Old Testament elders etc, not from Priests (though there are principles to be followed from the Priesthood).

While Levites and Priests assume their duties at 30, the Priests retired at 50 (Num 8:25), Elders were normally only ordained in their 50s in the Synagogue. In fact, the High Priest did not retire and Aaron actually entered office at age 83.

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,  
“This applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall come to do duty in the service of the tent of meeting.  
and from the age of fifty years they shall withdraw from the duty of the service and serve no more.  
They minister to their brothers in the tent of meeting by keeping guard, but they shall do no service. Thus shall you do to the Levites in assigning their duties.”

Did these become sort of overseers or guides to the younger Levites upon retirement?

The description of Levitical duties reminds one of Deacons. The *Treasury of Scripture* notes:

“the Levites, above fifty years of age, might superintend and assist their junior brethren in the ordinary offices, and give them and the people counsel and instruction; **but they were exempted from carrying the tabernacle and from other laborious services.** It is remarkable, that no law was made concerning the age at which the priests should begin to officiate, and though various blemishes disqualified them for the service of the sanctuary, yet they continued their ministrations till death, if capable. On the other hand, nothing is said concerning any bodily defects or blemishes disqualifying the Levites; but the time of their service is expressly settled. Their work was far more laborious than that of the Priests; it is therefore likely that the priests would not begin very early to officiate; and the wisdom and experience of age would increase, rather than diminish, their fitness for the sacred duties of their office.”

Later, King David reduced the age for those entering the priestly service to 20 (IChron 23:27). He also set up 24 chief priests (perhaps a type of the 24 Elders found in Rev 4:1-5?) and these must have been older men.

Wisdom comes with age – after all this begins with knowledge which takes decades to accumulate. Concurrently with this one must then develop understanding based on knowledge – this also takes time. Then wisdom is born. Elders must have wisdom and all cultures know that. There would be exceptions but those would be rather rare (eg Christ’s four brothers who were younger than He, ie James, Joses (Joseph), Judas (Jude), Simon).

The younger sometimes get jealous of their elders and today, influenced by political correctness, literally shout and scream at them uncontrollably.

Consider this: in most societies, tribes were led by elders as were the Hebrew peoples prior to Moses organising them at Mount Sinai. These elders led the nation under him (Ex 3:16, 18; 4:29; 12:21). Out of these elders, 70 leaders composed a sort of supreme assembly or court (Ex 24:1, 9, 14; Num. 11:16-30).

Others guarded the gateway or access into the villages and were thus known as “elders of the gate.”

Following are some Scriptures that may serve to throw further light on the subject:

### **IKings 12:6-11**

“King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, “How do you counsel *me* to answer this people?”

Then they spoke to him, saying, “If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them and grant them their petition, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.”

But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him.

So he said to them, “What counsel do you give that we may answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, ‘Lighten the yoke which your father put on us’?”

**The young men who grew up with him spoke to him, saying, “Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!’ But you shall speak to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins!**

‘Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’”

Comment: Rehoboam was 41 when he forsook the elders and turned to the youth (IKings 14:21). So elders are over 41 and likely to be at least in their 40s or 50s.

### **Psalms 71:5**

“For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence **since my youth.**”

Comment: How many can say that?

### **Proverbs 7:7**

“... and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, **a young man lacking sense.**”

**Ecclesiastes 11:9-10**

“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. **Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.**”

“Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for **youth and the dawn of life are vanity.**”

**Is 3:4-5,12**

**“And I will make boys their princes, and infants shall rule over them.**

And the people will oppress one another, every one his fellow and every one his neighbor; **the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the despised to the honorable.**

...

My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your guides mislead you and they have swallowed up the course of your paths.”

Comment: this is a prophecy for the end-time and thus is applicable to us, not so?

**Is 9:14-17**

“So the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed in one day—

the elder and honored man is the head, and **the prophet who teaches lies is the tail;**

for those who guide this people have been leading them astray, and those who are guided by them are swallowed up.

**Therefore the Lord does not rejoice over their young men,** and has no compassion on their fatherless and widows; for everyone is godless and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.”

**Mark 14:51**

"And a **young man** followed [Jesus], with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked."

### **1 Timothy 4:12**

"Let no one despise you for **your youth**, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."

Comment: The inference is not that people despise him because he is young – but will do so if he does not do the things Paul lists: example in speech, conduct, love, faith, purity. A youth in those days would have probably been someone in their 30s.

### **2 Timothy 2:22**

"**So flee youthful passions** and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

"... and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,  
to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

### **Titus 2:4-6**

"**Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.**"

Comment: Youth is good and enjoyable – but can be filled with vanity and be rather haughty, despising his/her spiritual elders.

In line with this, we should always read Titus:

"For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,  
but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

He must hold firm to the **trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine** and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. [today there would be other heresies including political correctness]

They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.”  
(Titus 1:7-11)

One contact wrote in reference to this issue in the Church:

“1 Tim 3

Titus 1:6-9

These verses really spell it out I think. 1 Tim 3:6 is particularly relevant but all of chapter 3 makes it abundantly clear that an ordained man, whether Elder aka Overseer, or Deacon must meet requirements that God has canonised for His church! Novices ie acolytes young trainees or wanna be Elders need to be protected from themselves! God says they can be conceited etc and whilst those who want to be ordained shouldn't be encouraged and trained up, they should not be ordained until they are no longer novices.

Does that mean novice in terms of age as well as understanding? Perhaps, when you think about maturity etc and how that needs to grow. That said, there may be certain fellows that are particularly mature when quite young in years.

Unless God makes it clear there is a special purpose for such fellows then the church should stick to the guidelines that God provided in Timothy and Titus. They are there for a reason ... to protect such young guns from themselves and to protect Gods people who they are meant to be edifying, helping etc.

If the church actually faithfully followed the requirements on this issue then the men chosen for these very important positions would, at the time of ordination, already have met the key requirements that God says such men should meet BEFORE they are made into Elders etc.”

It is a shame that some within the Church are affected by political correctness; do not adhere to a number of our traditional doctrines; want to change this or that. The impact of the world, TV, the educational system etc has affected them – please pray that those who are so affected can be helped by the Church and its elders to eschew such positions and watering-down the truth and social positions (eg ordination of women; male-female roles; soft approach toward homosexuality; abortion; globalisation, open borders and such like). Or be kept completely out of ministerial roles or spheres of influence. For it is clear from their conduct and words that is what they desire so much.

## **What about Jeremiah's Youth?**

Jeremiah was a young man, not 15 as some have suggested and he was not an Elder or Pastor! (cf Jer 1:6-9) He was a prophet so why do some look at him as an example of youth ruling over the elder as if this should be done. These Leftists – children of the 1968 revolution – will use any misinterpretation of the Bible to force through their agendas.

Prophets can bring messages and visions from God; they rail at Israel or the synagogue; but they are not young pastors over a congregation.

The misuse of Scripture concerning this is, frankly, outrageous!

Consider that the Hebrew word for *youth* in Jer. 1:6 is *na'ar*. What does it really mean?

### **Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers:**

“In Genesis 34:19 it is used of a **young man old enough for marriage**. The words are memorable as striking a note common to the lives of many prophets; common, also, we may add, to most men as they feel themselves called to any great work. So Moses draws back: “I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (Exodus 4:10). So Isaiah cries, “Woe is me! for . . . I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5); and Peter, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). Something of the same shrinking is implied in St. Paul’s command to Timothy (1Timothy 4:12). In tracing the whole course of Jeremiah’s work, we must never forget the divine constraint by which he entered on them. A necessity was laid upon him, as afterwards on St. Paul (1Corinthians 9:16).”

### **Benson Commentary:**

“Jeremiah 1:6. *Then said I, Ah, Lord God, &c.* — He modestly excuses himself from a consideration of the weight of the work, and the tenderness of his age, as in the next expression. *Behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child* — **We cannot infer from this, that Jeremiah was within the years of what is properly called childhood. For he might call himself a child by way of extenuating his abilities; as Solomon calls himself a little child, 1 Kings 1:7, although at that time he was married,** and must have been at least twenty years of age. And the word *child*, or *youth*, is elsewhere used of those who were arrived at the first years of manhood.

*Na'ar*: Young, immature, inexperienced male. Not yet born (Judges 13:5), newborn (I Samuel 4:21), infant (I Samuel 1:22), weaned (I Samuel 1:27), teenager (Genesis 37:2 - Joseph is about 17; II Chronicles 34:3 - Josiah was 16), adult (Genesis 41:12 - Joseph is 30), young warriors (I Samuel 25:9; II Samuel 18:5). Basically this word is the opposite of *zaqen* (old).”

There are long, technical articles on the subject of original Hebrew and Greek words for youth, their context, usage, multiple meanings and such like. That is not the purpose of this short article.

## Concluding Remarks

It is true that the Church has a responsibility to look after the youth and nurture them and this short study does not deny that nor is opposed to the youth in any way, of course. However no one has the right to negate or ignore the natural order of succession which is ordained by God and known over the centuries by most cultures.

Today many in the Church are infected by political correctness which is a direct outgrowth of the 1968 revolutionaries which in turn is a reflection of Leninist/Trotskyite dogma.

In other words this is a Leftist push that is not sanctioned by God as evidenced from His Word.

We must stand opposed to it and continue with the Biblical truths.

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