



Editor's Note

Chuck Gianotti

Elders' ShopNotes has a clear cut focus. Our goal is to provide help for the busy secularly employed elder. If you fit that description, then you have at least three major time commitments in your life: work, family and shepherding God's flock. Your work takes a lot out of you and your responsibilities as a family man are biblically important. At the end of the typical week, you are probably exhausted from all your responsibilities. Personal equipping for ministry is what often suffers.

While there are many books and resources available for your considered study, this ministry is designed to give you "bite-sized" input that is practical and can be digested in a relatively short period of time. Our prayer is that what we provide will be readily "usable" and applicable to your busy life and ministry.

Each issue contains a short doctrinal expo-

sition on some aspect of Biblical eldership. This will help you understand (or remind you) of the firm Biblical foundation that under-girds everything else we have to say.

But, this ministry is primarily about equipping you with the more practical areas of ministry. We want to help you put Biblical eldership to work in your local church. It is one thing to know truth, it is another to apply it. To this end, we include articles dealing with leadership principles and practical issues that will help in the tangible areas of "eldering."

Don't forget, you can get back issues of ESN from our web-site (see back panel for the web-address). If you have questions or issues you'd like us to address in future articles, please contact us.

The Lord bless you as you serve him in this "noble task." ●

Biblical Foundations

The Fourth Work: Protecting

by Jack Spender

The fourth duty of elders is to protect the church. Many dangers threaten God's people and can cripple or destroy a local testimony. While no one enjoys the study of evil, it is comforting to know that every true danger the church can encounter is covered in the Scriptures. In one sense, every act of good leadership protects the church, and every verse in the Bible equips believers to stand against spiritual warfare. But what broad lessons about protecting the church can we touch on in a brief article? Three passages will help us.

Watching the Flock

The first is John 10 which sets before us the example of the Lord Himself as the Good Shepherd.

As a true shepherd, His coming was announced to shepherds of His day. Every elder should study this chapter carefully. Above any shepherding skill or technique stands one great truth: "The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (Vs. 11). It follows then that "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3:16). Shepherding is not a hobby or leisure pastime. It is in some respects a life and death struggle.

Here too, we learn about the enemies of the flock: the thief and the robber, the wolf and the hireling. Clearly, the difference between the sheep and the wolf, between the shepherd and the hireling is not due to some learned behavior, but come from very different natures within. It is wonderfully true that Christ's sheep hear His voice, they follow Him, and will never perish. But His under shepherds are responsible to safeguard the church so the sheep can learn to follow the shep-

herd's voice and become fruitful in their time.

Defending the Fellowship

The second important passage is Acts 20. Here is the lesson that the church will face danger not only from outside (which we would expect), but also from within its own ranks. The warning points to dangers that may not respond to the gentle admonitions that are part of simple "overseeing work" (as covered in the previous article). Here, an individual (who may be considered a trusted brother) begins to divide the church by gathering a personal following. The motive is clearly stated: "to draw away disciples after them" (Vs 30).

The method is often a corrupt message. The English rendering "perverse things" (KJV) might suggest things so wicked as to be devoid of any truth at all. But the passive participle more properly refers to real truth which has been twisted or distorted, thus attracting those who know some truth. We tremble at those words "not sparing the flock." Devoid of pity, these can stand by and watch a local fellowship be torn to shreds and never shed a tear. The antidote is given in such words as "watch,"

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... we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
1 John 3:16 (KJV)

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Leadership Principles

Decision, Decisions!

by Chuck Gianotti

Like putting toothpaste back into the tube, recovering from poor decisions in leadership can be very difficult. It's far better to get it right the first time! The early church leaders had to learn quickly how to make wise decisions. In a matter of one day, the number of followers of Christ grew phenomenally from about 120 (Acts 1:15) to 3000 (Acts 2:41), and shortly after, further increased to 5000 (Acts 4:4). For the fledgling leaders of the early church, the learning curve for decision-making was quite steep. But, guided by the Holy Spirit, their initial decisions were wise and we can learn much from their example.

Two incidents, in particular, faced the young church. One was a practical issue, the other doctrinal. First, there was inequity of food distribution among the needy widows among them (Acts 6:1-7). There had been a movement of the Spirit among the new believers to share their resources. As it turns out, the distribution of these resources was somewhat skewed along cultural and ethnic lines. Those Jewish widows (now believers) from a Hellenistic background were being overlooked, while those believing widows with a more culturally Hebraic background were being well taken care of.

The second incident involved doctrinal controversy—whether circumcision and adherence to Mosaic law were required for believers. This led to what has become known as the Jerusalem council. A few principles for wise decision-making can be seen in these two incidents.

1. Good decision-making can remove hindrances to the spread of the Word of God. Notice, in Acts 6:7, after the practical problem was solved, “the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased ...” (NIV). The fact that this verse follows immediately after the problem-solving incident is not incidental. Had the early church been unwise in their decision, clearly the expansion of the gospel would have been limited.

Unwise decisions by elders create confusion and discouragement. Instead of resolving issues, poor decisions create more tension and problems. Instead of the church expending energy in reaching the lost for Christ, much time and effort is wasted with internal struggles. Wise decision-making frees up the believers to spend more time in reaching the lost and building other believers.

2. Wise decisions cause God's people to be encouraged. Following the Jerusalem counsel, a statement was drafted containing the decision made. When the Christians were informed of this they “... were

glad for its encouraging message” (Acts 15:30). God's people are built up and encouraged by the wise deliberations of godly leaders. It sets an example of firm, decisive leadership—and a sense that the shepherds are really looking after the sheep.

3. A problem cannot be solved unless the issues are clearly identified. In both incidents, the leaders heard and listened to the viewpoints of the people involved. They apparently understood the warnings of Proverbs 18:13, “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame” and Proverbs 18:17, “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.”

It is so easy to jump to quick conclusions about the merit of someone's concern. We must resist the urge to superficially con-

... the people read it [the decision] and were glad for its encouraging message.”
Acts 15:30 (NIV)

clude that someone has oversensitive feelings or is “nitpicking” about doctrine. Good leaders show respect by carefully listening to the concerns of the people.

4. Problems that are public should involve the congregation in the solution. While the level of congregational involvement depends on the situation, being too secretive can be detrimental. In the first instance in Acts concerning the feeding of the widows, the spiritual leaders invited the congregation to “nominate” men according to a defined criteria (full of the Spirit and wisdom Acts 6:3, 5). These men were to work out the details.

In the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), at least some of the deliberations took place in the gathering of the whole church (Acts 15:12 compare with 15:22). It must have been tremendously educational for the believers to see the spiritual leadership working through this doctrinal issue. In the end, they could wholeheartedly endorse the decision (“Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided ...” Acts 15:22).

Clearly, some decisions that elders make may involve sensitive information about people, and these, of course, must be handled with godly discretion and confidentiality.

5. Keep to your priorities. In the case of the widows, the apostles did not want to take too much time from their primary ministry: the word and prayer. Rather, they

delegated the problem-solving to capable men (while maintaining ultimate responsibility through the laying on of hands Acts 6:6). In the doctrinal issue, their priorities required them to be directly involved in the deliberations. Wise elders are those who know when to delegate and when to involve themselves. They should never delegate doctrinal issues. Elders are to protect the church from error. This cannot be passed off to others.

6. Some elders are more gifted in articulating a decision than others. In Acts 15:13-21, James seemed to bring the discussions into focus, summarizing well the consensus. Discussions can often drag on and on. This doesn't mean that one person has a greater say in the decision-making. But, happy is the group of elders who have one that can reduce all the discussions to a concise summary.

7. Take careful notes when dealing with serious issues. The council, upon reaching a consensus, put their conclusion in writing (Acts 15: 23). This served to provide a clear, unambiguous response to the serious doctrinal issue at hand. To only communicate orally opens up greater possibilities for misinterpretations, verbal nuances and poorly chosen words that mislead. If the decision is written down, then much ambiguity is removed. The process of writing out the decision forces people to select their wording carefully.

Recommended Reading

A General Introduction to the Bible, by Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix (Moody Press: Chicago).

In order to protect the flock of God, elders must be educated in sound doctrine. One of the most fundamental of all doctrines has to do with the scripture itself—*Bibliology*. Every thing we know about God (except the general knowledge of Him through natural revelation Romans 1:20) comes from the Bible.

How do we really know the 66 books of the bible are inspired and without error? What about the claims some make for other books to be authoritative? What was the process by which the early church verified the canon of scripture? How do we know that the apocrypha is not part of God's inspired scripture? How can we know for sure?

This text is well ordered and thorough, dealing with the subjects of Revelation, Inspiration, Canonicity, Transmission and Translations.

What About Our Own Kids?

by Angus Henderson

Having had the opportunity from God to bring up five children, my dear wife and I can honestly pass on some important steps God directed us to use to eventually see all five of them come to know Christ as Saviour!

We had major responsibilities in business and in church leadership during our children's formative years. Of necessity we had to prioritize our time between such activities and still have an active interest in the life of our family!

So here are six simple suggestions that may help in the important job of rearing children to know God in the godless society we live in.

1. Read the Word of God to your children from very early childhood. Read at mealtime, at bedtime, and in personal chats with them anytime! Read from a reliable, understandable version such as the New KJV or the New Living Translation (2 Timothy 3:16).

2. Augment Sunday School and Bible Club memorization with family memorization, and provide suitable rewards for learning valuable scriptures which will be engraved in their minds and hearts.

3. Encourage your children's chums to come into your home, rather than having your children regularly in someone else's home where God is not honored. Their interests and habits may be transmitted to your children. It was our happy privilege to see some of our children's friends come to know the Saviour as they enjoyed Christian

*Train up a child in the way he should go
and when he is old
he will not depart from it.*
Proverbs 22:6 (KJV)

books, cassettes and videos.

4. Introduce your children and their acquaintances in early life to Christian camps, young people's groups, bible clubs, and other extra curricular Christian activities. It is in such activities that some of our children and their chums accepted into their lives the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:24).

5. Prioritize your time to make sure that spending time with your children and grandchildren is high on your list. Some parents are so busy in business, or in other

activities—and yes, even in God's ministry—that their own children are uncared for spiritually and may never be reached for the Saviour, to the deep sorrow of their parents! Our children are our first mission field—our Jerusalem, then Judea, then to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

6. While our children were small we introduced them to a monthly "family discussion and prayer time." Have young and older bring topics of discussion and various prayer requests. List the requests and follow them up in ensuing months. Eventually thank God for His answers to such requests. It is thrilling to see God respond and the children realize our God is so great!

As our children grew older, married and had their families we continued to have these gatherings for prayer on a more extended schedule—every three months. Their children—our grandchildren—now add their requests and the parents have subjects such as jobs, spiritual problems and marital difficulties, etc. One branch of the family living far away occasionally sends their requests to the rest of us for prayer via e-mail! ●

Wives' Corner

Supporting In A Noble Task

by Mary Gianotti

I'm a list person. I make lists of things to do, people to e-mail and groceries to buy. I write down things I want to tell my children when they call, birthdays to remember and household chores to perform. Maybe it's because I have a bad memory. I prefer to think it's because I'm accomplishing a lot. Secretly I love to cross things off my lists; it gives me pleasure!

God likes making lists, also. One that applies to you and me in an interesting way is the list of qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Every elder's wife should be aware of these credentials. Who we are as women married to men shepherding God's church should largely be effected by this list. In past articles we have discussed that the woman is to be a "helper suitable" for the man (Gen 2:18 NIV). Timothy provides a guideline for our husbands which in turn can help us know how to best support them in what is described as a *noble task* (1 Tim 3:1).

Here's a good place to start: do I really think this business of eldering is a *noble task* or just a lot of meetings that get in the way of my plans? Do I view my husband's position as a dignified, righteous and good work that God values and is pleased with?

Or do I resent the time and energy it requires of my husband? I believe we need God's perspective on our husband's calling. Pray that you will see this work through God's eyes and have a heart to help him (your husband) in every way you can.

Take a minute and write the list of qualifications out so that you can ponder each one, considering how you will be able to assist you husband with these characteristics.

For example, the first in the list is "above reproach." Webster defines reproach as "a cause or occasion of blame, discredit or disgrace." There are many ways to assist our husbands in this area. This "assisting" requires us to take a close look at our lives. Are we reflecting Christ in our attitudes and actions? Let's look at a few practical ways we can do that.

I have a responsibility to support and encourage my husband in the area of honesty. Being truthful in our daily lives with each other and our children overflows in complete honesty with those around us. There is no room for white lies, exaggerations or altering the truth. I influence him toward honesty by my being honest with him.

Elder's sometimes make decisions and are not able to immediately give a full explanation as to why they took a certain course of action. This requires us as wives to support the decision and encourage others to trust the leadership God has placed over us.

Saying things like "I have full confidence in our elders" or "I believe the elders have sought God in this matter, I trust them." We can set a tone for other women in the congregation by our attitude towards those in authority. By doing this sort of thing we guard our husbands against undue criticism.

It is important in public not to discredit my husband by parading his weaknesses to others. We are one flesh and no one knows my weaknesses better than my husband and I his. This is a trust that God has given us, desiring that we help one another and build one another up in every way we can.

As leaders of God's people our husband's character is to be clear of accusations. Hopefully, you can think of other ways to support your husband in this important qualification of being "above reproach." ●

The Third Work *(continued from page 1)*

“remember,” and “warn.” But, let us remember that warnings with compassion accomplish more than cold harsh words. Paul gave his warnings with tears.

Protecting the Family

The third passage is Titus 1. Here the godly elder uses sound or healthy doctrine to refute those whose speech in public opposes or deceives while their conduct in private subverts (or undermines) entire families. This lesson is crucial. Most problems in the church—even internal ones—begin outside the church, often in the home. The family is the basic building block of the church as well as of society. Elders must take seriously those who are preoccupied with personal advantage or gain as they

move among God’s people (Titus 1:12).

The Best Defense

How then can elders lead against all these severe trials? The answer comes from the Acts 20 passage: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock.....to feed the church of God” (vs. 28). A godly example, pastoral care for the sheep and a healthy spiritual diet are essential.

But note! Elders must not through fear of danger allow the church to sink into a negative ministry. It is not criticism of misguided people and groups that builds up the church. We must do as Paul did, and commend the believers to God and to the word of His grace (Acts 20:32). Regular visits in homes and families provide invaluable fore-

sight into areas of potential trouble. Sheep that are loved and cared for will find it easier to follow Hebrews 13:17, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

At this season, may the words of an old hymn “While shepherds watched their flocks by night....” take on a new meaning. ●

From the Q-Files

“Decision is a sharp knife that cuts clean and straight; indecision, a dull one that hacks and tears and leaves ragged edges behind it.”
Gordon Graham ●

ELDERS’ SHOPNOTES

Editor: Chuck Gianotti
Editorial Assistance:
Pauline Hawkins, Jim Mayer

HOW TO REACH US

Elders’ SHOPNOTES
c/o 27 Watchman Court
Rochester, N.Y. 14624 U.S.A.
E-mail: elderssn@rochester.rr.com
Voice: 716.429.5435
FAX: 413.581.8535
Web: <http://home.rochester.rr.com/esn>

CONTRIBUTORS

Jack Spender
Bible teacher, Church planting

Angus Henderson
Elder, retired sales manager,

Mary Gianotti
Elder’s wife, Women’s ministry

Chuck Gianotti
Bible teacher, Church planting

“Be shepherds of God’s flock
that is under your care,
serving as overseers ...”
1 Peter 5:2a

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27 Watchman Court
Rochester, NY 14624

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