



Practical Ministry

Guarding Your Heart & Eyes

by Chuck Gianotti

On numerous occasions I have heard the assertion that relatively few Christian leaders finish well. Rather than debate the veracity of that claim, I find myself wanting to ensure that I don't give evidence for its truth. I don't want to become hardened in the truth as I get older, but to become seasoned in grace. As one older brother confessed to me once, "I pray frequently that I won't become a crotchety old man." Even Paul, the master disciple, was concerned for himself, "*Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified*" (1 Co 9:26-27 NASB).

Becoming stubborn, hard to work with, unbending, unkind, callous, insensitive—all can be justified by a carnal mind and coated with a spiritual veneer of austerity. One of the most pernicious pitfalls for not only leaders, but men in general, is found on the *internet*. It's one of those temptations that for some "is not proper to mention." It seems that even to admit to being tempted in this area is to admit inferiority of character. It goes almost without saying in a ministry to elders that we all know what Paul says to the Ephesians, "*But immorality or any impurity*

or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Eph 5:3). Knowing this doesn't remove temptation. If temptation is real, the danger of falling is likewise real—or it would not be a temptation.

Silence, especially in a publication like Elders' ShopNotes, will not make the problem go away. So, just how pervasive is this problem? I find younger men are much more apt to *admit* struggles in this area. But often there is an eerie silence among elders when the subject comes up.

Of course there is a natural reticence to talk about such things because of the nature of the subject. Even in a sexually charged western hemisphere the subject is an awkward one. Yet, as a brother recently mentioned, if there was ever a place where the subject of sexuality should be talked about it, it is in the church—for we worship the God who created sex. He has a lot to say about its abuse and misuse. He wants to protect us for His best. So how much more we need to be vigilant in this area.

The following article is adapted from a plan that has been used by many men to help maintain purity in their internet usage. I use it as do many other men who understand the real temptation the internet provides and who want to live godly lives. 

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Internet Accountability

by Chuck Gianotti

The internet is a great tool for accomplishing a lot in our technologically advanced society. Yet with a single click it can easily bring temptation to the believer. Many people find that overcoming sin and temptation on the internet is virtually impossible on their own. Now you can develop the discipline to guard your heart and integrity by utilizing a web-site called Covenant Eyes (CE) and developing an accountability with others.

The CE program gives you the tools to remove the secrecy and privacy of using the internet and promotes self-control and personal discipline. You begin agreeing with another brother or two to hold each other accountable for your internet usage. Then each of you downloads a program from the CovenantEyes.com web site. Once installed on your computer, it will track your web-surfing and send a periodic report to your accountability partner(s).

The report will include a list of sites you have visited, how many times you visited

them and it will highlight those sites which are questionable. It will even inform your accountability partners how much time you spend on the internet and which sites you spend the most time at. And if you attempt to disable the program, your partner will find out immediately! Doing a system restore (on PC's) is identified as well. For the average internet user, it is virtually fool-proof, so that during weak times you will not be able to circumvent the accountability.

Can you alter the records?

The CE program is an independently operated ministry maintained on computers in Michigan—therefore, the history of sites visited by the member can not be erased or changed (though they can be viewed confidentially over the internet by the user or accountability partners).

Why not just use a filter?

CE is not a filter so it does not actually block you from entering any website, but it

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Church growth is a touchy subject! Why touch it? There are many small, struggling groups that have precious saints meeting faithfully to please the Lord and serve one another. Surely the Lord is honored by their faithfulness. But in some cases, they fear that the light they have worked so hard to establish may go out simply for lack of people. This article is written to encourage such. Perhaps something will spark fruitful discussion; even the courage to step out of the comfort zone of tradition, and find new applications to well known scriptures.

Some years ago I heard an elder in a tiny assembly explain the small size of his group this way: "We don't care about growth in size; our focus is on quality." I remember thinking: "That sounds quite pious, but does the New Testament ever present the church with a choice between quality and quantity?" A healthy church grows in all ways.

It may take time and be a bumpy road, but maturity and increase are both Biblical ideas. Incidentally, during the next year, that particular group disbanded.

Facing the Facts

Churches are like children; not loved in proportion to size, but loved because they belong to God's family. Certainly, some huge churches seem to grow by compromising important Biblical teachings. And then there is the stigma of falling into the "church growth movement." Some believe that living in the last days means the situation is hopeless; why even try?

Small assemblies that want to grow should forget about all these worries, and seek to please the Lord by being all they can be with His help. This is the key. But are we really being all we can be? Are we reaching our full potential? Are we pretending that our time-worn traditions are Biblical principles that cannot be scrutinized or altered? Have we lost our relevance to the real world? Can there be revival?

Thoughts that Encourage

A quick reading of the history of the church shows that revival does happen.

Some great revivals have taken place in our own country in relatively modern times. Then there is the mighty working of God going on in various places today. One hears of the many thousands coming to faith in Christ in China; a recent figure released mentions 20,000 people per day! Churches are springing up in unprecedented numbers; the supply of Bibles is far behind demand.

It is true that the Lord promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). But it is also true that He gave us responsibility to do our part (Matt. 18:20), and promised to be with us as we do it "until the end of the age." At this writing the age has not ended. There is hope!

Having studied the subject of the

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growing church over the years, I'd like to briefly summarize ten traits that mark churches that grow, and then consider the question: "What can elders do to foster some of these qualities in their own local fellowship?"

Some of these observations will overlap, and I am purposely not including things that most evangelical churches share in common like prayer or breaking of bread, because almost all groups – whether growing or dying – practice these. Rather, let's think about qualities that have a Biblical principle at the heart, but may gradually have become hollow formalities or are misunderstood or even ignored.

Marks of Churches that Grow

1. *The leadership leads.* This may sound trite, but it's important. We have all heard the maxim "As leadership goes, so goes the church." Elders must practice both passive leadership, "be examples to the flock" (I Pet. 5:3 KJV), and active leadership, "they watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17); "feed the flock" (I Pet. 5:2), and "see that none render evil for evil..." (I Thes. 5:15). Nothing is more disheartening to the saints than elders who are too immersed

in personal interests of family or business to shepherd the flock, or leaders who simply cannot muster the courage to make difficult but necessary decisions.

2. *Quality spiritual food is a priority.* Another famous saying, "The Word of God builds the church," is absolutely true. The adversary has countless ways to distract a church from ministry that is both faithful to God and relevant to the people. False doctrines seep in, favorite themes are repeated while important doctrines are neglected, the time allocated for Bible teaching diminishes while entertainment increases, and so forth. But it remains true that the Word of God builds up the believers (Acts 20:32) and brings about "increase" in the church (Eph. 4:16).

Therefore some elders must "labor in the word and doctrine" (I Tim. 5:17).

3. *There is an equipping mindset.* Gifted men may reside in the assembly or may be invited in to visit, but they are there primarily to train younger believers to function. [Some elders seem not to have noticed that this mandate is given to the evangelist, the pastor and the teacher (Eph. 4:11,12)]. Delegating responsibilities to younger believers, who may not perform flawlessly at first, is an important part of training. Servants laboring full time make it a goal to be "working themselves out of a job."

4. *There are opportunities for meaningful involvement.* The key word here is "meaningful." This is not about giving the people odd jobs or "busy work" to keep them occupied, but rather helping them to function in the core decisions and activities of the church. Ordinary people of the fellowship are equipped "for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12). The discovery and development of spiritual gifts figures prominently in this endeavor.

5. *The church fosters a healthy environment.* This word "environment" is difficult to define in spiritual things, but it is so readily sensed by young and old alike that it merits prayerful study. It is a spiritual climate in which the Holy Spirit can work freely; where younger believers can "give it a try" and not be criticized;

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Serving is a privilege. If that statement is true, why then does it often feel like a burden or an obligation?

Our hearts are heavy and tired, yet our minds tell us we should be joyfully engaged in serving the Lord and his people.

A godly woman I know has a card above her computer that reads: "The true test of a servant is whether I

act like one when I am treated like one." Having served the Lord for many years she still finds this difficult. A younger woman commented, "If it isn't a convenient or comfortable thing at the moment, I struggle with the right attitude."

Most Christian women know what Scripture says. In Genesis, we find that the Creator had a perfect plan. The plan was that man and woman would reflect God in the newly created world. In the same way that God had worked to create the universe, humankind would mirror His character by working to take care of the garden. Eve would be Adam's assistant, working alongside him; she would be his suitable helper. From the beginning

of time, by God's design, we have been created to serve. Embracing this truth will help us on the path of service.

But why is it so difficult at times to have the right attitude? The difficulty came when God's perfect plan was ruined. In Genesis 3, we find the woman wandering by herself instead of working

The true test of a servant is whether I act like one when I am treated like one.

alongside the man as the Lord intended. We all know what happened next. All women were put under a curse that deeply affects our ability to serve with a pure heart.

"To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you'" (Gen 3:16 NASB). The word "desire" has to do with *control* (see Gen 4:7 for a comparable use of the word "desire"). Women now have the tendency to *control* the

men in their lives. Some women do this in a passive-aggressive way and others in a more verbal-emotional manner. Either way the curse to control does not incline us to serve the way God intended. The truth is that when we are left to our own means we will normally operate under the curse. The compulsion to control will cause stress and discord in our lives. Serving will become a burden and feel like an obligation.

However, the Lord has *enabled* us to serve. It is important to believe that we were created to serve and to recognize that the curse of the fall is in us all. Therefore, we ought to continually confess our deep need for the *Lord's* control in our lives. This will head us in the direction of joyful service which is indeed a privilege.

"There is joy, joy, joy in serving Jesus,
Joy that throbs within my heart;
Every moment, every hour,
As I draw upon His power,
There is a joy, joy, joy
that never shall depart."



What Makes a Church Grow? (cont. from page 2)

where people are more important than programs and where the church has a true family spirit.

6. *There is a Biblical approach to outreach.* In simplest terms the gospel is good news on the go. The church is not waiting for lost people to come looking for God. It is not trying to evangelize the saints! It is a family gathering where the people are trained and built up to carry the Good News out to the world. When lost people come in, they are most welcome, but the focus is not on them. They are watching the family of God in action, because all of the items in which the early church continued steadfastly (Acts 2:42) are clearly for Christians. Believers who love the Savior and love one another, will find more success in winning souls than any costly or intensive program can provide.

7. *Biblical fellowship is active and dynamic.* Perhaps no term is more misunderstood than "fellowship." It does describe the Christian's relationship to Christ, and it does relate to taking ones

place in a Biblical church gathering. But there is more, so much more! The many "one-another" responsibilities described in the New Testament are all parts of the wonderful body life of sharing together in the practical blessings of God's grace. Going back to Acts 2:42, teaching, breaking of bread and prayer all refer primarily to a vertical relationship between God and the believer. But fellowship describes the limitless horizontal relationships among believers in the church. It is an absolutely crucial responsibility of any church to be strengthening unity by strengthening relationships, in the family, in marriages, and among believers.

To be continued

In the next article, we'll finish the list, and then think about some ways that elders might lead the church toward a more fruitful practical outworking of some of these ideas. But don't wait for part II; there is no time to lose in getting started!



The Q-Files

"Lord, I long to bless my wife, my daughter, my friend. Therefore, I will value holiness above either pleasure or relief from pain or the illegitimate satisfaction that sin ... so easily brings." Larry Crabb, "*Safest Place on Earth.*" p. 129.

But some might say, "Lust is unbearable and aggravating!" They're right, says Martin Luther. "It's very similar to other difficulties requiring patience that believers must face, such as fasting, imprisonment, cold, sickness, and persecution. Lust is a serious burden. You must resist it and fight against it. But, after you have overcome it through prayer, lust will have caused you to pray more and grow in faith." Martin Luther (quoted by Philip Yancey, *Christianity Today*, October 2003).



Internet Accountability (cont. from page 1)

informs your accountability partner of your internet surfing activities. Filters can impose some undue restrictions on the user. In addition, counselors have found that imposing these kind of restrictions on a person are not helpful in developing self-control.

Filters can also be turned off or bypassed by the one who installed or activated them, rendering them ineffective during times of weakness. CE helps you develop self-discipline and accountability. (There are times when a filter used in conjunction with CE may be helpful for families—see later).

Are there ways to fool the CE program?

At times your resolve may be low and temptation may be high. Once installed, CE is highly tamper resistant. Attempts to modify or manually delete the program will render the internet inaccessible to your computer.

What about multiple computers?

You can set up one account to work with multiple computers in your home. Activities on all the computers will show up on the report. Or you can set up multiple accounts, each with separate reports generated.

Listen to what some users have said:

“Let me tell you how pleased I am with this software. It really captures the essence of how internet responsibility should rest—not with an external control that can be deactivated, but within the heart of the user. A very cool set up.” Dale—Network Administrator, Bible College, Edmonton, Alberta Canada.

“I tried everything from expensive

software to inexpensive proxy programs...nothing worked. Filters seem to become a challenge, a sort of mental game that is there to be beaten—and many men do beat them. It wasn't until I became a member of Covenant Eyes that my addiction began to disappear. As a matter of fact, I have not seen ANY internet pornography since I installed the program several months ago. I praise God for Covenant Eyes and your organization!!” Anonymous.

“When you know that your accountability partner is going to see where you've been surfing, it has a way of sucking the life out of temptation. And, it's amazing how this service has positively affected other areas of my life too.” Rob, editor New Man Magazine.

How can I get started?

1. Decide on one or two accountability partners, men you can trust and who can hold confidence.

2. Enlist a group of men to get involved. This also adds an extra layer of accountability by letting others know that you are committed to purity and integrity on the internet. The camaraderie of many will help you stay strong and encourage others to join. (Note: *only* your selected accountability partners will see the report of sites you visit).

3. Go to www.covenanteyes.com and sign up. There is a small monthly fee, but the investment in your purity and integrity is well worth the money! See the CE web-site for details.

4. There is no cost to your accountability partner to receive the reports.

When a filter is necessary

As mentioned above, CE does not block access to any site. When you accidentally access an undesirable site, you will have to explain to your accountability partners—the net effect is that you will tend to stay far away from sites that might post links to questionable things.

If children are using the same computer as you do, there may be the occasion where an undesirable site is encountered. While this will be recorded on the accountability report, your children will still have been exposed to the site. In cases like this, we recommend using a filter in conjunction with CE. With very young children, the built-in filters of MS Windows or APPLE software may do the trick. With computer-savvy adolescents, you may consider a “server-side” filtering service. The CE website has recommendations for filters that work well with the CE program.

Other helpful ideas to consider:

1. Keep your computer in an open area of the home such as the family room, if possible.

2. Situate your computer so the screen faces the doorway of the room. This is a good idea at your work place as well.

3. Limit the amount of time your children spend on the internet.

4. Avoid using the internet late at night when no one else is awake or at times when no one else is at home.

5. Memorize Philippians 4:8.

Our prayer is that every man, especially Christian leaders, would take steps to guard their hearts and eyes while on the internet.



ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

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