



Editor's Note

With over 56 issues and around 200 articles under our belt, Elders ShopNotes is half way through the 10th year of publication. We've covered topics like Elders' Qualifications, Biblical Teaching on elder related issues and Practical Applications. In our travels we often encounter elders who receive ESN regularly and are

encouraged. Recently, I met one at a conference who is the last remaining elder in his small assembly. He said ESN is a lifeline for him. Another assembly uses ESN articles as a launch pad for their regular elders' study of the Word. One couple uses it for their devotional time. We pray the Master Shepherd will continue to use this publication in your lives and ministry — for His glory!

Biblical Qualifications Integrity—part 1

by Chuck Gianotti

Integrity ranks top of the list of important human endeavors. I use the word “endeavor” because integrity is a lifelong pursuit, it is not something to be gained and then put on the mantle for display along with other accomplishments. Because we will not arrive at perfection this side of heaven, integrity is an on-going quest. However, our faithful Lord looks for this growing quality in His redeemed people, especially leaders.

The term itself comes from the root word “integer” meaning “a complete unit or entity.” Integrity is the capacity for one to be complete, whole—for all parts of a person's character, thought and behavior to fit together in harmony. One might contrast it with the opposite concept, duplicity, where a person's behavior disconnects from his words.

Integrity undergirds everything. It gives purity to our quest for holiness, regularity to our being truthful, consistency to our faithfulness and clarity to our transparency. Without integrity we are only sometimes holy, sometimes truthful, sometimes faithful, sometimes transparent, sometimes _____ (fill in the blank). Just a small amount of dog manure defiles a culinary delight.

In order to strive for integrity, we must constantly remind ourselves what it looks like to be a whole person. For this, we don't look to man's standards, but God's. Many have recognized in Psalm 15 eleven characteristics that can be labeled “The traits of a man of integrity.” These provide a good picture of what we can aim for.

Connecting with God through integrity

While the word integrity does not specifically occur in this psalm, two questions at the start invite the reader to consider, “Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?” (Ps 15:1 NIV).

Obviously this speaks of more than just entering the earthly tabernacle. The high priest alone could do that, and then only once a year—no one else. Even then, only through

the most strenuous rationalization could one say the priest “lived” or “dwelled” there.

Rather, all are invited to apply for access into the presence of God, who for Israel was pictured as being in the earthly tabernacle. This has to do with being welcome, of being “at home” — to experience the fullness of God's hospitality. Since the Lord is a complete unity, He is the epitome of integrity. God defines it by His existence and His character. Unity repels duplicity. There is no duplicity or contradiction in God in any sense or at any level. For anyone to comfortably dwell in His presence requires integrity.

According to the psalm writer, those who pursue the following eleven traits, behaviors or attitudes are pursuing the completeness of life and character that exists in God Himself. The question of who may have this access is not a matter of who *by name*, but who *by description* (Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible). This dwelling is not an entitlement, so the question naturally arises, who qualifies?

Certainly as NT Christians, we have access through the grace of Christ (Heb 4:15-16). But, in Psalm 15, our standing in grace is not in question, but rather our experience of fellowship (i.e. “dwelling”). This is similar to what the apostle Peter writes, “... be all the more eager to make certain about His calling and election. For if you do these things [*i.e. supply moral excellence, etc.*], you never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:10-11).

Psalm 15 gives us tangible examples of where and how integrity is seen in the realities of daily living. We will now look at the first two descriptions of a man of integrity.

He whose walk is blameless

The word “blameless” comes from the Hebrew word *tamim*, which means complete, sincere, or perfect, virtually identical to our

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Leadership Principles

Teamwork

by Jack Spender

Not much thought is necessary to conclude that a group of people is not necessarily a team. A team has a common objective and all the members must rise above personal preferences and work together to reach the goal.

If we think of sports teams, some excel and some never seem to “get it together” for the big victory. What makes the difference? Some would say money and others would say luck. Those may be factors in the world, but how about team work in the church such as a group of church elders? Obviously, the requirements and rewards are very different in spiritual things.

Let’s consider briefly the importance and benefits of real team work among overseers, some suggestions to encourage unity and fruitfulness in team building, and some dangers to watch out for.

Team Work is Biblical and Important

Every local church described in the New Testament had a plurality of mature men serving together as a leadership group, often referred to today as the “board of elders,” or simply “the oversight.” Actually, “team” might be a better term for church leadership, because it emphasizes serving through unity and self discipline rather than through authority and decision making.

Reasons why the church should be led by a plurality and not a single individual are not difficult to discover. Church leaders are ordinary men, most often working men with homes and families, not highly trained professionals. Scripture and history provide abundant examples of how God uses a plurality of servants to carry on His work in the church. In addition, a proverb tells us that there is safety in the multitude of counselors (Prov. 11:14 KJV).

Then too, different personalities, spiritual gifts and life experience in their leaders allow the people of the church the freedom to relate to the shepherds they feel understand them. Another benefit is that sharing the work load among a group helps prevent “burnout.”

Finally, as individual elders retire from active work or are called home to the Lord, and younger men are added to the number, the church is spared the trauma that often accompanies leadership change in churches with a single authority figure.

Building and Preserving Team Spirit

Those who provide spiritual feeding and direction for the flock will understandably occupy a prominent place in the perception of the people. Paul admonished elders to take heed, not only to the flock of God, but also “to yourselves” (Acts 20:28). It is of vital importance to the well being of the church that church leaders be held in honor – not just because the Bible demands it – but because the individuals have developed

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a team spirit and approach to ministry. They have gained the credibility that results from facing difficult people and issues together with wisdom and grace, all the while demonstrating a kind regard for one another.

These things can strengthen the leadership team or they can become the source of competitiveness, jealousy or arrogance. How can a leadership group cultivate a team spirit in a balanced way? The answer is a blend of spiritual virtues and practical experience. Here are some thoughts about each.

The Spiritual Side to Teamwork.

Every elder should remember that his assignment from Christ the Head is not only to shepherd the flock, but also to shepherd his fellow elders! He must love them, pray for them, and seek to serve them. If he cannot do this, how will he do it for the rest of the saints? Earnestly desiring to see his fellow workers grow in their spiritual development, the use of their gifts and the esteem of the congregation is a deeply spiritual matter, ideas foreign to the old nature and the flesh. These endeavors require humility and a

work of the Spirit of God in the heart.

Also important is an environment where mutual encouragement and acceptance can blossom. The adversary will constantly seek to spoil the team spirit by attitudes and actions that bring individuals in leadership into competition with one another. To resist this, each must function “with brotherly love in honor preferring one another.” (Rom. 12:10) A genuine spirit of love and deference will go a long way to compensate for differences of age, experience or special gift.

The Practical Side to Teamwork. In order for the team to work together smoothly, each individual must be committed to the team and willing to make personal sacrifice for the good of all. But this must be more than theory; it must

manifest itself in the day to day business of overseeing the affairs of the church; it must be intensely practical. Do all the brothers have some

visibility in leading the church? Are each brother’s viewpoints and concerns on matters of discussion sought out and listened to carefully in the elders meetings? Do all the brothers stand together in difficult situations requiring discipline or major change? Do the brothers speak well of one another and defend one another when possible? Is it agreed that all the brothers must all be in unity before the church moves ahead with changes? (See the ESN July 2003 Volume 4, Number 4 issue for dealing with an elder who continually hinders unanimity with “veto” like power)

Another practical point in the life of any team is the need for rest and refreshing; those special times of getting together (including wives!) just to get to know one another and deepen friendships – apart from “the work.” I remember one young man in an assembly years ago who confided in me, “Everyone in our assembly wishes he were an elder because we see how much our leaders encourage one another and enjoy working together.”

Avoiding the Pitfalls. Most good things are not preserved by letting “nature

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The fact that you are reading this article probably indicates you are a wife who is engaged in the Lord's work with your husband. What a privilege it is to be able to work together with people, helping them to grow in their walk with God. At the same time, it is a tremendous responsibility. As we seek to support our husbands, let us consider the role of integrity in our interpersonal relationships.

Integrity is defined by the dictionary as the quality of being complete, whole, having moral soundness, and uprightness. Remember the Bible character who was commended by God for his integrity in the face of great spiritual and physical adversary. Job's wonderful example is worthy of our consideration. In Job 2:3, 9-10, we see him being commended for his blameless life, his uprightness, his godly fear and his hatred of evil. What an inspiration to follow!

Integrity can help us to be blameless – those who have a good reputation and good testimony before men and women.

Integrity allows us to be upright – fair in our dealings with others, honest, known for doing the right thing.

As we grow in godly fear, we will defend the honor of His name even at great personal cost. Our word will be dependable as we reflect the living Word

in our speech. We will be known as those who can keep confidences. In short, we will be those on whom others can depend.

Like Job, we want to hate evil (Proverbs 8:13) and embrace what is good.

As we seek to cultivate integrity in our lives, the Scripture tells us that it will guide us (Proverbs 11:3) and protect us (Psalm 25:21). Our communications will be more wholesome and uplifting. We will be more conscious of the fact that we represent the Lord, not our own personal opinion, as we go about our spiritual work. God helps us as we desire to bring honor and glory to His name. Many times I have sensed the Lord's protection from saying the wrong thing or judging a situation unfairly. I look back with gratitude at the Lord's intervention in those cases.

What will be the outcome if we do not use integrity in our dealings with others?

We will very soon lose our credibility. Others will not have confidence in us. Our motives may be questioned and our words will not be taken seriously. We will lack the moral and spiritual power to have an effective spiritual ministry for God. This can have negative ramifications not only for the wife, but for the

elder/husband as well. Rather than being seen as a strong spiritual leader, he may be viewed as having a huge weight around his neck, someone who is keeping him from being an effective and credible leader among God's people. The reputation and character of the wife directly affect how others view her husband's integrity. If I cannot keep confidence, others might feel that my husband cannot keep confidence either! They may be less likely to come to him with their spiritual struggles. But, at the heart of the matter, a wife's lack of integrity can pose a constant, but subtle pressure on her husband to compromise his integrity and character as well.

Do any of us really want to be seen in that light? As we ask the Lord to help us grow in this godly characteristic, we will be blessed by what He does in our lives. In turn, we will be a blessing to all we meet, especially our own husbands.



From the Q-File

Lose all rather than lose your integrity, and when all else is gone, still hold fast a clear conscience as the rarest jewel which can adorn the bosom of a mortal. *C H Spurgeon*

Teamwork (cont. from page 2)

take its course," and relationships are no exception. As in a marriage, serious prayer and conscious effort are needed to safeguard friendships. Here are a few suggestions to prevent the team spirit from going sour.

1. Accept your differences. Note how different the twelve disciples chosen by the Lord Jesus were, and He never compared one disciple to another. That there are differences right within the eldership is clearly implied by verses such as I Tim. 5:17.

2. Make it a never ending work to seek balance in the team. True, strong personalities will never trade places with the quiet brothers, and that's OK. But don't allow the team to become lopsided by one or two strong voices dominating everything. Strive to bring out the quiet

strengths of brothers who might be content to hide in the background.

3. No matter how many struggles over difficult issues take place behind closed doors, present a united stand to the church. This is not hypocrisy but a valuable exercise in looking for areas of common agreement, even though small. The word is still needed today, "Honor all men; love the brotherhood..." (I Peter 2:17)

4. Don't allow things to get stale. There are creative ways to refresh the group. Go on a retreat, take a sabbatical, meet with elders from other assemblies to bring some fresh insights, take advantage of the wonderful array of resources available today in good books, seminars or online.

5. Insist that the next generation get involved, no matter how reluctant they may seem. No church structure is more conducive to equipping the saints and training leaders than the true New Testament church with its practical exercise of the priesthood of all believers and absence of a professional clergy! You might even consider honoring a self-imposed age limit on elders.

Conclusion

Most elders are rightly content to wait for a coming day, when elders will receive "a crown of glory that fadeth not away." (I Peter 5:4). But there is nothing wrong with the joy and morale boost on the team when hard work and determination yields a few spiritual touchdowns in the present!



Integrity (cont. from page 1)

English word *Integrity*. A blameless person is one who lives in unity with truth. “His activities are in harmony with God’s standards” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary). Further, this person’s walk matches his talk – and therefore will feel comfortable in God’s presence. He is not, as James says, just, “a hearer of the word” only, but also a “doer of the word” (James 1:23-25). It would seem that integrity would be the most natural thing for a creature formed by the supremely integral God of all there is.

The challenge for us mere humans is our constant struggle against our own hypocrisy, especially we Christians. The anatomy of the Christian struggle is this:

First, as renewed creatures of God (2 Cor 5:17) and those committed to His word (2 Tim 3:16), we hold to an extremely high standard. We take seriously admonitions such as, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16).

Second, we expect Christians should live up to that standard.

Third, we are painfully aware (when we are honest) that we ourselves fail to live up to that standard (Romans 7).

That is what we call sin, or better yet, the sin nature. We have fallen from the integrity with which we were created, the wholeness, the completeness of being in harmony with ourselves, with each other and with God. Even with the help of the Spirit who indwells us, we still fall short.

Sometimes we justify ourselves, “Yes, that is true, but we are not *as* hypocritical as the unsaved are.” But, that is beggarly thinking. Indeed Paul rejoices that the solution is *not* our perfection but our having no condemnation in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Yet the spirit in us compels

us to strive for integrity, not to just sit back lazily on our justification.

We elders, preachers, teachers and writers are most in danger of failing the standard, for we are the ones who most emphatically and systematically proclaim it. Therefore, we are held to a stricter judgment (James 3:1)—we set ourselves up for it! We took on that mantle of responsibility when we said “yes” to the Lord in becoming an elder (or preacher, teacher or writer).

What does that mean in the daily life of an elder? We must be vigilant to put into practice that which we teach or expect of others. For example, just exhorting the believers to love and care for one another is not enough. We need to be sacrificing our Saturday morning golf game in order to help a brother repair his roof. Or buy a less expensive car, in order to help a brother just have one to get to work and back. We need to share our faith, not just challenge people to do it. We ought to be the first to confess our offense against someone, rather than just calling people to it. The ones we shepherd need to see the integrity of our putting into practice the very things we are calling others to.

On the one hand, we cannot set up ourselves as the epitome of perfection, but there needs to be a sincere effort to match our walk with our talk and a good measure of progress. Nothing will undermine an elder’s effectiveness more readily than failure in this. On the other hand, the elder who pursues a walk that is blameless will feel at home in God’s presence. Even in his failure to do this perfectly, his wholeness compels him to own up to his failure and will motivate

him to reach higher. That is why David prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way” (Psalm 139:23).

He who does what is righteous

The person who is comfortable in God’s presence goes beyond the absence of duplicity, and actively seeks that which is just. We are faced every day with decisions between right and wrong. Even in the “small” areas of life, choosing that which is less than right is tantamount to spitting in God’s face.

We Christians, even elders, can become more concerned about how we look than what we really are. Therefore, we can easily justify unrighteous behavior. With great theological erudition, we can assert, “Well, our justification is in Christ alone!” Yes, that is true, but Psalm 15 starkly rejoins that the one who *does* what is righteous will be right at home with God. Again, we are talking about fellowship, not eternal standing.

In practical terms, the right choice might be to confront the strong-willed elder and stop being passive. On the other hand the righteous thing may mean my confessing a “pugnacious” attitude (1 Tim 3:3) and a controlling attitude, praying for the Lord’s strength to change – and setting your mind to making the change. It means taking the high road of grace and peace.

These two characteristics of the man who is at home in God’s presence are foundational to building integrity. We will continue next issue with more from Psalm 15.



ELDERS’ SHOPNOTES

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