

*Biblical Teaching**by Chuck Gianotti****Paul's Final Message—Part 1***

The work of “eldering” is both taught and caught. By this I mean as elders we need verbal instruction, challenge and accountability relative to our carrying out the essential work of eldery in the local church. But we also need role models, the examples of those who have gone before us. Both teaching and modeling are needed. Paul provided both for the Ephesian elders, as recorded in his farewell speech in Acts 20:17-38. In this three part series, we will learn from Paul as he reminds them first of his behavior and then his character while among them; and finally we will consider his solemn warning to them.

A little background is in order.

Paul, with Priscilla and Aquila, visited the city of Ephesus on the final leg of his second missions tour. Leaving the couple behind, he continued on to Antioch, his home base. Later, he revisited Ephesus on his third tour. In his absence, Priscilla and Aquila, along with the powerful preacher Apollos, built on the foundation laid by Paul, and the work had flourished. Paul stayed on for three years (Acts 19:10, 20:31), the Word of God flourished both in Ephesus (19:20) and in all of Asia (19:10).

After continuing on his missions tour through Macedonia and Greece, he traveled past Ephesus, stopping at the coastal city of Miletus about 30-40 miles away. From there he sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus and gave them his final teaching (Acts 20:17-39). This is the clearest passage in the NT where Paul personally interacted with elders—his heartbeat for the church and for the ministry of elders is very clear.

We can't overlook the fact that the Ephesian believers, including the elders, would have been converts for no more than about five years or so. At some point in their young history,

elders had been appointed, as was Paul's custom with the churches he planted. He must have seen in those men, identified as elders, not perfection, but potential. They had received considerable teaching from Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos and possibly Timothy (who resided in Ephesus when Paul later wrote his two letters to him). What Paul looked for was faithfulness, as he instructed Timothy, “*The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2 Tim 2:2 NASB).

Paul begins his final message by reminding them of his example. Notice that his message includes pointing out that he modeled a certain behavior for them. Clearly, he wants them to imitate this very thing, the modeling of the behavior they should pass on to others. There is no boasting or arrogance here—like a parent showing a child how to tie a shoe lace, “Here, watch me do it.” That child when he or she grows up, then in turn remembers how he learned how to tie shoes and so models this for his children.

What then is the example Paul modeled for them, which they had opportunity to observe over the course of three years?

He declared the truth (20)

This involved not so much reasoning with them as it did putting the truth out there, like letting a lion loose. The Word is powerful and, at times, requires no explanation—it simply needs to be proclaimed.

He taught the truth (20)

At other times Paul explained the meaning of things, “reasoning” with those willing to engage him (see Acts 19:9 NASB). This requires patience and understanding.

He testified to the truth (21)

There were times when Paul shared his own personal experience

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue begins our 12th year of publishing Elders' ShopNotes. Praise God for His faithfulness in making this publication happen and sustaining it over these years. Thanks also goes to the wonderful help through the years: our writers, editors, proofreaders, translators, all those who print down multiple copies and spread them around to others—and all those who have supported this ministry with their prayers and financial support.

You will notice the new format—we hope you like it and that it doesn't interfere with your ease of reading.

As usual for the first issue of the year we are including an index of all past issues. Check it over for articles on a wide variety of subjects, all having to do with being an elder and/or leader in the local church.

with the truth as it applied in his life. He certainly lived the repentance and faith he preached, having recounted it multiple times in the Book of Acts.

He was driven by purpose (24)

Paul was clear about his purpose and stayed on track. A leader of God's people must keep clear why he is doing what he is doing. He must not waste time in areas non-essential to God's purpose for him.

He worked hard (34-35)

No one could call Paul lazy; he carried his own weight while also serving the Lord. Ministry and living both require strenuous effort.

He served long hours (31)

This was a natural bi-product of a self-supporting man who had a passion for serving the Lord. For at least some of his time in Ephesus, Paul was what we would call “bi-vocational.” This secular work was not a lack of faith on his part, but a matter of necessity and example.

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Paul's Final Message (cont.)

For at least some of his time in Ephesus, Paul was what we would call "bi-vocational."

He was generous (34)

He worked his tent-making trade (see Acts 18:3) so that he could also support others.

Paul set an example for three years and during his last speech to them he consciously reminds the elders of the "example-value" style of his teaching, namely his behavior. He was confident that he had lived his life consonant with his words. The elders, then, should not only follow his example of integrity, but should then model that for others as well.

The truth of the matter is that elders *are* examples both to the whole church as well as

other elders—the real question is whether we are good examples or bad examples. Let us not hide behind false humility, but so live our lives with the heart- attitude, "Here, watch me." Not out of arrogance or self-exaltation, but out of a humble spirit of genuinely wanting to show by our behavior how the man of God, the leader of God's people, should live. If we don't do it, then who will? Let me encourage us all to follow Paul's example, and become a good example to others.



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ESM

by Jack Spender

Practical Application

New Life for the Assembly

Dwindling churches are a common sight in our day. It is almost a contradiction in terms; the gathering of those who have found true life - dying. In some cases it is understandable; a group has come to the end of the work to which it felt called, or perhaps the Lord has removed the lamp stand (Rev. 2,3) But the norm is: as long as there are lost people to win and believers to equip, a local church should be moving ahead in dependence on the Lord. New life is essential to this process.

Elders, being older and more mature in the faith, are examples to the flock. Some are dynamic witnesses for the Lord, but nothing in Scripture limits soul winning to them. In actual fact, many times it is the young people who have business contacts in the world or friends in the neighborhood through children, etc.

However, there is one area in church life where elders have a unique opportunity to make a substantial impact on this matter of new life for the assembly, and that is the subject of this article.

"Loose Him, and Let Him Go."

In the well known account of the raising of Lazarus (John 11), it is clear from the text that Lazarus was completely dead. Wrapped in grave clothes according to the custom of the time, sealed in the tomb, the odor of decay after four days was expected.

At the bidding of the Lord Jesus the stone was rolled back, the command given, and the inevitable result of the coming of the Word of Life to one dead: "He that was dead came forth" (vs.44 KJV). What a thrilling, yet shocking sight for all those who stood by! Death reversed; new life instead of decay and corruption. The mourning could cease, and people

could go back home. Regular activities could resume.

Not so fast; the record goes on. Not only was Lazarus alive, but he was "bound hand and foot with grave clothes..." Now it is interesting that the Lord did not instruct Lazarus to "wiggle free of the grave clothes." With arms bound against the body, that would have been difficult. Rather, he tells those nearby to "Loose him and let him go." In other words, "He is alive but he still needs more help, and that part you can do." This help could not be rendered from a distance. One would have to get close to the "dead man" and possibly get his hands dirty. As often observed, this provides an interesting application in spiritual things.

Present Day Application

Scripture describes the new birth of a person as "passing from death to life." (John 5:24). This miracle occurs when the Word of God does in the spiritual realm what it did that day in the physical body of Lazarus; suddenly death gives place to life. Take another look at Lazarus walking out from the place of death. There he stands, hard to see the man for all the evidences of death draped over him. But under all those bandages (interesting similarity between the words "bandage" and "bondage") there was real life. It was undeniable because of the evidence. Dead men don't walk. How his sisters wanted to hear his voice, see his face, and embrace him! What an incentive to lay aside mourning, and do what the Lord commanded: "Loose him and let him go."

And this raises a question. Is the assembly where we meet actively involved in helping to

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New Life (cont.)

free young believers who have crippling evidences of death and the grave still clinging to them? Later we read of Lazarus enjoying fellowship at the table with the Lord. Imagine him sitting there still wrapped in half of the grave clothes, because those close to him were too busy with other concerns to finish the job.

Elders should remember that the assembly is a place where this work goes on continually, and that herein is one of the best motivators for people to speak of their faith to friends and neighbors. We might paraphrase the words of the blind man in John 9: "I don't know all the theological answers as to what has taken place; but I can tell you that I used to be blind, and now I see, and you cannot argue with that."

The Joy of New Life

There is nothing like the coming of a baby to encourage a family, and there is nothing quite like the presence of brand new believers to bring joy and excitement into the church. As the baby grows and becomes a child and then a productive young person, new blessings will follow.

Ordinary people in the fellowship can derive a quiet confidence from witnessing this process. The reasoning goes: "If I share the Lord with friends and see them come to Christ, I have a spiritual family to bring them to, where they will be nurtured and loved and accepted in spite of whatever may be clinging to them from the old past. The thought of working together with others to free that new believer from things which limit the enjoyment of fellowship, is truly exciting."

A Spiritual Nursery

One of the priorities of leadership is to evaluate the preparedness of our spiritual nursery. More important than any program or material item, there must be a family spirit and a loving atmosphere. Saints must be taught that all true children are dear to the Father, and should be cherished by us. Regardless of degree of maturity, they have a place at His table where milk from the Word will be available to them (1 Pet. 2:2). Older believers will care for them, train them, and protect them from complex questions that could choke them (Rom. 14:1).

How, realistically, is all this going to happen? In the first place, elders must hold these values as convictions and model them before all. But that is not enough. Every area of the life of the assembly needs to be evaluated in the light of this question: Can a baby Christian grow well here? This is one important part of shepherding.

Taking Stock

Both spiritual and temporal provisions should be checked with questions like: Is some part of the public teaching of the Word simple and clear for them to understand? Are there opportunities to learn to pray, to ask questions? Will correction come gently, giving them sufficient time to learn from what they are discovering for themselves in the Bible? Are there simple tasks in which they can participate to serve the Lord side by side with older believers, sensing family acceptance? All these and many other questions are the rightful domain of those who lead in the assembly.

Don't leave out the tough questions about loving those who still have many grave clothes. Positionally, sanctification is complete, but patience is needed while practices change.

If we discover failure in all this, we can remember that special promises from the Lord Himself are given to those who are humble. And it can be a humbling experience to admit that we have wandered away from important priorities in caring for people. We have fallen into a rut of empty tradition, just keeping the meetings going endlessly while people who struggle with sins and all sorts of grave clothes drift away, unable to become the spiritual stars that we had been hoping for.

Incidentally, this whole subject would make for serious discussion in the elders meetings. Many lament that more are not being saved, but it is a question worth asking as to how we are handing those who already have been. In many cases their testimony to the lost is our best outreach. *ESM*



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There is nothing quite like the presence of brand new believers to bring joy and excitement into the church.

Don't leave out the tough questions about loving those who still have many grave clothes. Can we really accept and be close to them; close enough to help free them from the old life?

The Q-File

Godly leaders know their ability to lead will fail unless the Lord works! Moses and Solomon were ones who prayed because he knew what the real issues of leadership were:

"Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people." (Ex 33:13-14)

"Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people, for who can rule this great people of Yours?" (Solomon: 1 Chron 1:10)

Time

*We need to reclaim
time and use it
more effectively for
the honor and glory
of our Lord.*

*Effective service
flows to others
only as we have a
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relationship with
the One who said,
Be still and know
that I am God."*

A father once asked his little girl why she threw her clock out the window. She replied that she wanted to see time fly. We smile because the truth is brought home to our hearts that time indeed does have a way of slipping easily through our fingers. Many days go by without anything being accomplished that is of lasting value. The Scripture commands us to redeem the time because the days are evil. The enemy of our souls would seek to "kill the clock" because he understands the value of time better than we do. We need to reclaim this commodity and use it more effectively for the honor and glory of our Lord. How can this best be accomplished?

The year 2010 is already history. The start of a new year provides us with the opportunity to reevaluate and recommit to God's priorities for our lives. Women, especially elders' wives, who understand and value relationships know that we make time for those things in life that are truly important to us. With that in mind, I would like to ask how much value you place on your relationship with the Lord of the universe. We know that effective service flows to others only as we have a strong and growing relationship with the One who said, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10 KJV). Are we guarding our time of fellowship with Him each day? Do we stay in His presence until we have received some nugget of truth or thought from Scripture that truly nurtures our inner man? Are we becoming more sensitive to His voice? Do we understand that He is the one who assigns us our portion, our workload for the day (Psalms 16:5 NIV)?

We can only know His mind and will as we spend time in His presence. Giving our first fruits to God in all areas of life helps to ensure that each day we live will have some eternal value. As women we are very busy with many concerns and demands on our time. If we fail to spend time with Him, we only hurt ourselves and our ministries. Maintaining our relationship with the Lord helps us to keep our spiritual balance. As we become more sensitive to every gift He has given us, we will see our use of time as a trust to be cherished, not sometime said to be squandered. May the Lord help us in the year ahead to be those who redeem the time. As we do, we are laying up treasure in heaven. *ESN*



Ruth Spender

Book Excerpts

"What motivates you to want to lead and teach people? Desire to help people, a sense of duty, enjoyment of leadership, money, the pleasure of teaching people, peer pressure? For Christian leaders, the primary answer must be love. Love is the greatest motivating power in the universe. It is at the heart of the gospel. God's love moved him to give his Son for our salvation, Love is the indispensable motivating force for all Christian service. Leadership is to be motivated by a threefold love: Christ's love for us, our love for Christ and love for others." *Alexander Strach, "Leading With Love." Lewis & Roth Publishers, 2006, p. 27.*

"The common life of the church ... seems to have functioned from the first in terms of an alternative family ... The problems which arose in relation to the care of the needy, particularly widows, are most readily comprehensible if we envisage the church, not as a part-time voluntary organization of the like-minded which left normal social and familial attachments unaffected, but as a group with definite boundaries. If one belongs to it, one did not belong any more, certainly not in the same way, to one's previous unity, whether familial or racial ... from baptism onwards, one's basic family consisted of one's fellow-Christians." *N.T. Wright, "The New Testament and the People of God." Fortress Press, 1992, p. 448-449.*

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Note: All words referring to God have the initial letter capitalized. While the original languages of the Bible do not use capitalization, this is the convention in some translations but not in others. So at times there may be inconsistencies in usage in ESN articles.

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"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ..."

1 Peter 5:2a NIV