



Leadership Principles Visionary Eldership

by Chuck Gianotti

Vision--that's the catch word of modern business and churches. It's a good word. One that Webster defines as "unusual discernment or foresight." Some people have it, some don't—it seems. What really makes the difference?

Well, the disciples were your basic plodders—that team of men who would later revolutionize the world as appointed witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8). These followers of the Lord Jesus were not inherently men of vision. They came from the hum drum of life, caught up in daily, dull routines like everyone else—without much glimmer of hope beyond their practical existence.

Men of vision don't jump out like hot popstars on hurried Sunday mornings. Jesus ignited the first flicker of light in his novice followers, saying "*Blessed are your eyes, for they see*" (Matt 13:16). And then He began to fan their flicker into flames!

Incubation of Godly character breeds Godly vision.

How can we become a people of vision? This question challenges the church today. The answer is quite simple: *incubation of godly character breeds godly vision*. A brief look at the Apostle Paul's farewell to the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20) reveals some of these basic character requirements. Paul had spent three years stoking the young faith that had flared up in their hearts (Acts 20:31). Now he was giving the fire one last aeration. He would never see them again. Yet, no detailed plan was left with them. Rather, Paul's discourse conveyed the qualities necessary to apprehend a vision from God for themselves.

Every generation, every new guard, must possess its own vision from God. What is needed is not the passing down of our humanly designed forms of ministries and applications. We don't want succeeding generations to mimic our outward arrangement of things, like carbon copies. The greatest heritage to be passed from one generation to the next is the Christ-like character that engenders sacrificial vision for the kingdom of God.

Godliness makes the difference between a vision of God versus a vision from man. In this magnificent discourse of Paul, we see six characteristics necessary for becoming elders embraced with a vision for God's work. In this issue we will cover two of them.

Godly Vision Requires Humility

"I served the Lord with great humility ..." (Acts 20:19). Humility proves to be the most elusive of Christian character traits. The very effort of ascending to this trait belies the very thing we seek to acquire. Yet, Scripture is saturated with teaching on this subject! See for exam-

ple, Rom 12:3, Phil 2:1-11.

For a vision to be godly, we must forgo the need to draw attention to ourselves. "*For it is not the man who commends himself who is approved, but the man whom the Lord commends*" (II Cor 10:18). If it is God's vision, He Himself will commend us. We are free to direct all credit and attention to Him.

Some helpful measuring sticks are: 1) How frequently do I use the personal pronoun when I talk about "my" vision? 2) How do I react when people disagree with me or oppose my vision? 3) Do I complain about others who don't share the vision? A godly vision is not self-affirming, big numbers or hype. "*For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as men. We are fools for Christ ... up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world*" (II Cor 4:9-13).

So how do we get humility? One thing is sure, the harder we try by human means, the worse

it gets! True, we are told repeatedly in scripture, "Humble yourselves ..." Yet, only God can fashion humility in our lives and we need to welcome the tools He uses: trials, opposition, adversaries, humiliating circumstances. These things either bring out the pride in us ("Why me?") or develop humility ("Lord, thank you for cutting me down to size"). Seems to me that "humbling ourselves" is more of an acceptance of God's work in our lives than an activity that we "do."

Godly Vision Requires Passion

"... with tears ..." (Acts 20:19). Paul modeled the passion of Jesus. Not a sterile, logical choice, Paul's passion catalyzed his vision. Passion, according to Webster, is "an intense, driving feeling." There is no vision without passion.

Much spiritual sight is lost for lack of time in our busy lives. Nowhere does scripture say, "*If you have time, then help with the vision.*" The question is not really one of time, but of priority. We always make time for that which grips us deeply. What our passion is, becomes our priority. What our priority is, we give our time to.

The Lord Himself was motivated by passion for mankind. "*For God so loved the world ...*" (John 3:16), and therefore, He gave it priority. The Creator longed for his image-bearing creation to be
(continued. p. 4)

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Biblical Foundations

Discipline in the Church - Part 2

by Jack Spender

In the last article, we thought about dealing with serious sin in the assembly based on the text of I Corinthians 5. At the conclusion we mentioned the light which Paul's second letter to Corinth shed on the matter. The sinning man repented and the church must now receive him back into the warmth of fellowship. But we cannot leave this study yet. There is a greater lesson to be learned than how to deal with sin in the Christian community.

On the surface it may appear that the main contribution of the second epistle is to assure us that even in the most difficult cases there is hope. But looking more carefully, we can gain some insight as to how things came to this point in the first place. Some would urge that an investigation into conditions at Corinth should not cloud the simple fact: sin is sin and when discovered must be dealt with or it will spread. Quite true. Yet sin is rarely

"simple" in relationships, but is often the manifestation of a complex network

of hidden actions and attitudes that have gone unheeded for some time. So it seems to have been at Corinth.

Toward the end of his treatment of the whole matter in II Corinthians 7, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the difference between godly or genuine sorrow which leads to repentance, and the sorrow of the world that leads to no true change of heart or action and eventually leads to death. A serious situation has existed in Corinth, and a change of heart has come.

But as we ponder Paul's words a question suggests itself: to what situation is he really referring? Certainly he mentions "the one who did the wrong," (vs. 12), but is that all? His explanation is arresting. The primary reason for writing this painful letter (I Corinthians) is "not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you." One gets the impression that even as he helps the church deal with a local problem, the knowledge that things have not been well in his own relationship with the Corinthians weighs heavily on his heart. Indeed, the attitude of the church to the man who had been a spiritual father to them (that is, who led them to Christ) had been soured.

A brief overview of the situation may be helpful. Apparently, Paul was neither hand-

some in appearance nor eloquent in speech (II Cor. 10:10). On at least one occasion he had changed his travel plans with respect to an intended visit to Corinth. There were certain illustrious persons at Corinth who were quick to point these things out, calling into question Paul's authority as an apostle, and by implication the validity of his message. The believers had to some degree been influenced by this criticism so that Paul felt the need to defend himself against accusations that his purposes were insincere (1:17). Must he begin again to commend himself? (3:1). There was a problem in the Corinthians' affections: "you are restrained in your own affections" (6:12 NASB). "Receive us," he writes, "we have wronged no man." (7:2).

Now taking all the foregoing into consideration, as we read the seventh chapter once more, the conviction presses upon us that Paul in speaking about repentance

Toleration of the immoral man's conduct was really a symptom of a deeper problem in more fundamental relationships.

(7:9-11) is referring primarily to a problem in the Corinthians' relationship to himself. Titus had come from them and brought word that the church had turned from its bitter attitude towards Paul (7:6-7), and he is now examining the evidence of genuine repentance, both of the sinning man and of the Corinthians in their attitude towards him. Indeed, the fine details of his language can be explained in no other way.

What rich lessons are here for us! How could there possibly be brokenness at Corinth over a sinful relationship among themselves when their own hearts were filled with bitterness and malice toward their own father in the faith? Toleration of the immoral man's conduct was really a symptom of a deeper problem in more fundamental relationships. Paul knew that to address the one while ignoring the other would be missing the point. In fact, there could be no true restoration extended by those who were in the wrong themselves.

This puts a new light on the matter of discipline in an assembly. How easy it is to ignore the beam of pride and envy in our own eye even as we seek to deal with a comparative speck in the eye of another that has come to light among us. Must we then seek near perfection among ourselves before dealing with open sin? No, but whenever sin is discovered it would be well to

make sure that all efforts at restoration are done humbly, "considering ourselves" (Gal. 6:1).

In all of this we see a powerful reason for maintaining intense love and purity in relationships throughout the assembly. Darkness in even a few corners of the room will allow harmful things to go undetected. May the Lord help us to maintain "fervent love" (I Peter 4:8) among ourselves. This critical area must ever remain under the prayerful and watchful eye of assembly elders. (ESN)

Filing System for Elders

Be-coming an elder means potentially stepping into a quagmire of paper work. The desk drawer gets filled up fast, or the pile of papers in the corner gets hopelessly mixed up. It is essential that you be able to store and retrieve vital information quickly.

Every elder needs a method for keeping and retrieving the myriad of papers, files, notes and resources. I recommend using a 2-drawer filing cabinet with file folders to start. In the cabinet you can set up multiple filing systems. For example, you can have 66 folders, one for each book of the bible. Or you can use topical files, one for each major topic (e.g. the "Person of Christ"). But as you collect more and papers, you may want to divide larger files into more specific ones, like "Deity of Christ", "Humanity of Christ", etc.)

As you take sermon or study notes, come across magazine or news articles of interest, or interesting quotes, you can file them in biblical book order or topical order, depending on what they relate to.

Another file setup can be for what I call "pastoral" files. I keep these in a separate drawer. Here you could file, elder's minutes, ministry reports, letters, counseling notes, etc. In other words, anything having to do with your church's activities and ministry. It is a good idea to keep copies of all correspondence for future reference and clarifications.

Keeping information is not worth the doing unless you can retrieve it when needed. With a system like this, you will be able to find and use resources you stored away years previously. Why not consider setting up your filing system? (ESN)

Wives' Corner

Penny For Your Thoughts

by Ruth Spender

In working with young believers we are constantly teaching them the importance of reprogramming the computer of their minds so that they begin seeing life from God's perspective. This process takes time and perseverance. Each of us is influenced by a vast world of telecommunications which bombards us daily with programming, literature and information of all sorts and we also have an old nature which is prone to ungodly thoughts.

Of course, young believers aren't the only ones who need to apply themselves to this task, for each of us needs to be diligent to "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Paul admonishes us to "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5) "and be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of the mind" (Romans 12:2a). We are to think upon things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report (Philippians 4:8). This is not easy to do in a fallen world, but we really let down our guard when we think, "No one will know if I'm viewing questionable reading material, en-

tertaining ungodly thoughts or watching a raunchy program or movie." We need to remember that the Holy Spirit, who lives within each of us, is exposed to whatever we see or do. Is He ever grieved by our activities?

As elder's wives, we are in a position of influence at home and in the assembly. But, do we understand how much Satan wants to have our minds as his playground, realizing that once evil gains entrance, it is a tool he can use to diminish our spiritual vitality and thus negatively affect our husbands? He especially desires a foothold in the lives of those who are in leadership. We need to encourage one another not to buy into the notion that what we do in private doesn't affect anyone else. Proverbs 23:7 remind us that as an individual thinks in his heart so is he. It is a sobering fact that what we think on is what we become and it is manifested for all to see by our behavior and attitudes.

It's good for an elder's wife to stop frequently and ask herself some challenging questions. For example, what is the status of my mental health? Are my thoughts anxious, angry or hurried? Am I

thinking about that off-colored joke I overheard or a lustful scene from a book or video I should never have read or seen in the first place? Whatever it may be, if it's not edifying, I need to take steps to reprogram. The goal is to think more like the Lord Jesus and thus become more Christ-like. Many things affect my thought life, but I do have control over what I meditate on and what I allow in through my senses.

May we like David be willing to say, "I will set no wicked thing before my eyes" (Psalm 101:3). This means evaluating the material we allow ourselves to read and being discriminating in what we watch. The prayer of our hearts should be, "Lord, help me to be sensitive to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in my life. May I never do anything to grieve Him." We need to confess ungodly thinking as sin and replace those thoughts with Godly thoughts. We need to ask the Lord's help in dealing with anxiety, anger and other negative emotions. This is what is meant by renewing the mind. As we move in this direction we will be a greater asset to our husbands and in the spiritual work God has called us to. (ESN)

Practical Ministry

Arranging Ministry

by Jack Spender

Elders know the value of good spiritual food for the flock. Teaching that is faithful to God's Word and relevant to the needs of our day will strengthen the flock and build the assembly. To provide this nourishing diet, elders must do more than just fill open calendar dates with speakers for Sundays. There are different groups of people that must be prepared so that all will work together for edification.

1) Those who open the Scriptures should have some idea of the state and needs of the flock they are addressing. Brethren from the home assembly will know this but visiting speakers will appreciate insights from the local shepherds as to areas of teaching that have been well covered or perhaps neglected.

2) The hearers must be encouraged to pray diligently, attend faithfully and listen carefully to the messages.

3) Elders can help a congregation learn to accept ministry from younger men.

4) Those who share in the preliminaries of the meeting as in prayer, music and announcements should understand that the focus of the hour will be God's message. Things that squander precious time or offer competing presentations may weaken the ministry in the long run. The goal must be to get the Word of God into the hearts of the Christians while they are still capable of attention and meditation.

5) Even those who care for small children make an invaluable contribution to this effort and should understand the importance of their part.

Communication is crucial to good oversight and, when carefully done, does not quench the work of the Holy Spirit, but becomes a tool for blessing. (ESN)

Resources

Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free, by F. F. Bruce. (Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, Michigan). 1977.

The title is taken from 2 Corinthians 3:17 and F.F. Bruce does a masterful job of unfolding for us the life, passion and ministry of the apostle Paul. Beginning with valuable background and history that sets the 1st century context, the story is unfolded in an interesting, highly readable way.

Thirty-eight relatively short chapters make this an easy read in segments without losing much continuity. As with all authors, you may not agree with Bruce 100%, but elders should be able to evaluate any work such as this, gleaning the valuable and ignoring the marginal. Having said that, Bruce has given us a remarkable treatment on this important subject. Indeed, as we understand the passion of Paul, we may find ourselves yearning more for a heart truly set free. (ESN)

Leadership (cont.)

reconciled to Himself. The Apostle Paul's heart was on his shirt sleeve when he said, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race." (Rom 9:2-3). John Knox is reported to have said, "Lord, give me Scotland, or I die."

How can we develop this kind of passion? I find myself praying, "O Lord, break the stranglehold of fleshly passions and self-centered desires. Break my heart with the things that break your heart." Then, go out and make yourself available to those who are struggling, the "unlovely" people of your fellowship, the "down and outers" and those who are hurting. Listen, feel and reach out.

(To be continued next issue)

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Letter To The Editor

Your recent article (part 2 of developing a Shepherd's Heart in ESN, Vol. 3, No. 2 April, 2002) was especially encouraging to my wife and me, as we have gone to a husband & wife visitation ministry. Sometimes if a family has been experiencing illness or some other difficulty, we will purchase a four person meal from Boston Market and share a meal and then some fellowship and pastoral encouragement afterwards. We hope and pray that others ... will catch the vision of reaching out to the lost, the young, the injured and the healthy.

Editor's note: If you have discovered an effective way of shepherding God's people that you would like to share with other elders, please send or e-mail in your ideas.

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Acts 20:17-21

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

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Speakers' Block?

by Chuck Gianotti

It's Monday night and the speaker for next Sunday begins to work on his subject. What will he speak on? He prays but nothing comes to mind. We all know what that is like. In the typical Sunday school, the teacher's subject for the day is part of a long term plan for the class. We call that a curriculum. What about a similar idea for ministry to the whole body of believers in the local church? Under this scenario the elders would lay out, for example, a one to five year "curriculum" that focuses on covering a wide range of ministry doctrines and biblical passages? In such a curriculum, the elders could pray and work together to sense the overall flow of the ministry from the Lord.

This would not be set in stone, but could be rearranged or changed as time progresses and as the Spirit leads. Flexibility would allow for special needs or emphases. Such a plan could help prevent over emphasis on certain topics and ensure other topics are adequately covered. It can help keep the local church from unbalanced or lopsided ministry and "hobby horses."

Does this effort take the place of the Holy Spirit? Not as long as the elders are following the Spirit's leading. After all, can the Holy Spirit not provide guidance for a five year plan for ministry as well as a one week "plan"? The key remains, in either case, for the elders and speakers to be clear about the Lord's leading.

What one local fellowship did was begin by listing all the major doctrines, special topics and issues, and particular books or biblical topics that the Lord was leading them to address. Next, they determined which meetings were the best place for each particular teaching. For example, they planned to teach various doctrines, Bible books and biographies from the Bible at their Sunday morning teaching meeting. Subjects like Christian parenting, marriage enrichment, spiritual gift development were to be presented at special Sunday evening meetings. Other subjects could be best handled in small groups and offered as "electives" at other times during the week. Just an idea, hmmm.

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

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