



Biblical Foundations First Things First

by Chuck Gianotti

Gifting and calling come from God; training and equipping come through men. The apostle Paul was the consummate trainer and equipper. When he couldn't do it in person, he did it in writing—and we have two of his training manuals, letters written to Timothy.

We as elders should know these letters well, for in them we learn 1) what Paul instructed Timothy about leading and shepherding the church, 2) what Paul instructed Timothy about his own leadership ministry and 3) what Paul's own leadership traits were, as can be uncovered in the way he wrote these letters. These letters, in my opinion, constitute the greatest manuals ever penned on leadership in the church. While some people have studied the Gospels for the leadership characteristics modeled by the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul's writings to Timothy were written explicitly with spiritual leaders in mind! Beginning with this issue of Elders' ShopNotes, we will be looking at selected studies in the books of 1 and 2 Timothy.

Purity of the Gospel

Central to Paul's ministry was the foundational concern for the purity of the true Gospel. This was his proverbial "go to the wall" issue. Any effort to taint, twist, modify or embellish the message would discover in Paul a staunch antagonist. Twice in Galatians 1:8-9, he says that people who teach contrary to the true Gospel are to be "accursed". Today the need for defenders of the gospel is as critical as it was in Paul's day. Movements come and go, many of them trying to *redefine* the gospel. Nothing could be more central for carrying on Christ's mission than fidelity to the true message. The book of Galatians, thought by many to be Paul's first book, was his flagship writing in this regard.

As Paul's life and ministry moved on in years, the necessity of leaving well trained, adequately equipped younger men was essential. Around A.D. 63, after all of his extant communication with the churches was completed, he turned his pen to one of his young associates, Timothy. In his two letters, Paul reflects some of what he had taught Timothy in person through years of traveling and ministering together (2 Tim 2:2).

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Tested and Proven

Timothy was, by the time of writing, field-tested and proven. Paul had written a few years earlier to the believers in Philippi: "*But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because ... he has served with me in the work of the gospel.*" (Phil 2:22 NIV). He was an example to believers of Christ-like "other-centeredness," whose focus of ministry was to "... *genuinely be concerned for your welfare.*" (Phil 2:20) So Paul was not writing to a novice, but to a seasoned veteran, albeit a young one, who was doing well in ministry. He writes to kindle the flames of Timothy's ministry so that Timothy would become more of a self-starter and would himself, "... *fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you...*" (2 Tim 1:6). Timothy's training was just about complete, he was able to propagate and defend the precious truth of the Gospel. He would probably never see Paul again.

The Leader's Visibility

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope... (1 Tim 1:1)

Paul begins his first letter to Timothy in the usual fashion by clearly identifying himself—the very first word is "*Paul.*" This was not an occasion for misplaced humility in obscuring his identify. He

modeled the importance of a teacher or leader taking full responsibility for his teaching. Paul was willing to stand up for and by his teaching. I am reminded of anonymous letters or tracts I have received over the years arguing this point or that, from people unwilling to stand by what they say but willing to be more forthright by their obscurity than coming out into the open. Fortunately, Paul was unlike that.

The Leader's Ministry

Paul confidently stated up front his authority to write, calling himself "*Paul, an apostle...*" In some circles today people are reticent to identify their spiritual gifts for fear of sounding arrogant. Yet the apostle, who wrote, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ...*" (Phil 2:5 KJV) had no fear of contradiction or hypocrisy. He was simply stating the facts. His apostleship was no cause for self-promotion, the cost of his

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First Things (cont.)

spiritual gift being too high for such low ambition. He embraced the immense personal sacrifice (1 Cor 4:9) and suffering (2 Cor 11:23-33) because of the “*hope*” that he found no where else but in Christ. He had the burden of all the churches to carry as well (2 Cor 11:28)! For a person to identify his gifting from the Lord is to humbly accept the burden of responsibility and the cost that comes with it. This is true for every spiritual gift—especially for leadership. There is absolutely no room for “high mindedness,” but there is humbleness in identifying your gift and embracing it.

The Leader’s Identity

Paul consistently claimed his identification with Jesus Christ. Immediately in his introduction to the letter, he makes this clear: “*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus ...*” He did not attach himself to a religious movement nor a set of principles, however biblical they might be. Rather, at the core of his commitment was his Savior. To the Corinthians he said, “...*but we preach Christ crucified ...*” (1 Cor 1:23) and, “*I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Cor 2:2). To the Philippians he confessed, “*I want to know Christ ...*” (Phil 3:10).

While he preached many practical things, such as morality, relationships and even church order, as he does here in his writings to Timothy, they were all somewhat peripheral to the core of his message, namely Jesus Christ. Even in talking with the seasoned Timothy, Paul did not leave this to be assumed. These were not idle words, or just “Christian” lingo. He was an apostle of *Jesus Christ*. That absolutely colored all he did and taught. For those of us who are elders, we are elders of *Jesus Christ*. Leaders are leaders of *Jesus Christ*. What ever our calling or gift is, we are “that” of *Jesus Christ*. We cannot afford to let this slip. We should never allow identification with a denomination, a movement or a set of principles modify our identification with Christ.

There is only one identity worthy of those who have been bought with the price of Christ’s blood. This is not just a matter of words. The reality of Christ’s presence in our ministries, not just the words to that effect, must be jealously

guarded. This must precede all of our ministry, even on a daily basis. Thus, as he embarks upon instructions to his co-worker, Paul keeps his perspective clear. First things first!

The Leader’s Mandate

The apostle never forgot that his ministry was not a volunteer position; he was on assignment, “*by the command of God our Savior and of Christ.*” He did not take this upon himself for his own benefit. He did not arrogate to himself the pedestal of glory. In fact, he found the experience of his ministry just the opposite, “*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 to men*” (1 Cor 4:9). He was driven simply by obedience. “*Yet*

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when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16).

What can we learn from this as elders? Our calling as elders is by God’s design and direction, as much as Paul’s apostleship was by God’s design and direction. It was not left up to us to volunteer for it. Paul exhorted the Ephesians elders that, “... *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*” (Acts 20:28). However, like Paul, we as elders should wholeheartedly embrace this assignment from God, as Peter adds, “*Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be...*” (1 Peter 5:2). The NASB translation’s ill-advised use of the word “*volunteer*” here obscures the point, whereas the word “*willing*” used in other translations conveys the sense much better. Clearly, we should fully embrace our calling as elders. But ultimately, we serve at His pleasure!

The Leader’s Motivation

Paul’s reference to Christ Jesus as “*our hope*” underscores the overriding motivation in his life and ministry, the end-game, so to speak, the big picture.

Anticipation of the day when His Savior would be fully revealed provided incentive for laboring hard—all his aspirations would be fulfilled then. The hope of Christ’s coming saturated his life. And as elders and leaders, we too ought to keep Christ’s coming constantly in our mind. That provides motivation during difficult times when you may want to throw in the towel.

The Leader’s Signature Characteristics

To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (1 Tim 1:2)

Before launching into the bulk of what he has to say, Paul provides his signature introductory emphasis on “*Grace, mercy and peace.*” Every one of his writings begins with *grace* and *peace*, while some, like this letter, also include *mercy*. And

every one of Paul’s writings concludes with *grace*. Again, Paul is not given to words that, in this case, amount simply to a routine greeting. For him *grace* was the cardinal theological

truth, the center of the pure Gospel. While his focus was on Jesus Christ, the reason for this focus was because of his profound understanding of *grace*, which points to the defining relationship between Christ and himself. Ministry, as this implies to Timothy, must be bathed in *grace*.

Being a letter about leadership in the church, this message is sorely needed. Elders must be all about *grace* in every aspect of our ministry. People should know that we really are willing to sacrifice our own good for theirs. Not because they deserve it, but because God has been gracious to us, overlooking our faults and shortcomings. Even when He allows suffering or chastises us for pride, He is being gracious—for these are all designed to help us become more Christlike in our ministries. His *grace* in Paul’s life in dealing with pride became the source of strength (2 Cor 12:9-10)! When we see other Christians exhibiting the fallen nature of sinfulness, we should remind ourselves of God’s *grace* toward us and extend that same *grace* to others. Rather than being quick to criticize them for not being mature, or being too swift to discipline them for moral failures, might we first put the arm of encouragement around

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If sheer number of mentions in the Bible is any indication, one thing that is close to God's heart is the protection of widows, orphans and strangers. Literally dozens of times in the Old Testament, we find exhortations and warnings to kings and judges about defending those who lack the strength and means to protect themselves. Righteous men are to "plead the cause of the poor and needy," and not turn a deaf ear to the cry of the fatherless and widow.

No wonder that in His first recorded public reading from the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus commented on a passage which marked His ministry by a concern for the poor, the broken-hearted and the prisoner (Luke 4:16-19). His values in this were passed on to the apostles, as seen in such actions as the care of widows in the church, and the reminder given to Paul and Barnabas by the twelve apostles to remember the poor during their ministry travels (Galatians 2:9-10).

Living in an affluent country, people in many assemblies find little occasion to take these things literally. Of course there are the missionaries, and they have contact with poor people, and we share with them financially, but that's about the extent of it in some churches.

It is not out of place, then, to remind elders how relevant this principle is in virtually every Christian church—of the concern for the weaker among us! To see this, we must look at things from different angles. Consider the following examples:

Illustrations to ponder

The shy individual in the assembly who finds it difficult to initiate a conversation hears a message charging every Christian to evangelize others. However, no where is it stated in Scripture that all believers are evangelists. Instead we learn that all are witnesses. One basic difference between these two is that the evangelist initiates and the witness responds. How many quiet people have been made to feel like second class Christians over comments that equate an aggressive personality with spirituality?

Consider the single mother or widow who feels "out of the loop" because there is no one to talk over the discussions and decisions made among the men of the church. Plans are made and new courses

of action are adopted with input from leaders and couples, while those who live alone "will hear eventually."

Think of the youth and the new Christians who may not be confident or polished in their participation in the life of the church. Harsh words from critical older ones can do some serious damage to their sensitive spirits.

Then there are those whose chief service for the Lord is prayer in secret. Is it clear to all that those who labor in prayer make a priceless contribution to the church? Or are they made to feel that public (that is, visible) service is

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most pleasing to the Lord, and prayer is reserved for shut ins and others who are unable to really produce?

The list could be multiplied. Think of those with handicaps or disabilities. Think of the elderly or those with chronic illness. Think of the illustrious place given to certain spiritual gifts in the body such as the pastor or the teacher, while the one gifted in mercy or the person with the humble gift of "helps" goes along in the background.

Now someone will say that these will have their reward from the Lord, and this is certainly true. In that sense, the more hidden our service for the Lord, the better. But that is beside the point. Key ingredients of unity and harmony in the assembly are things that preserve fellowship, and elders must always be sensitive to those who, through no fault of their own, might be pushed out to the fringes of the "family" circle. All these need the protection and defense provided by shepherds who are sensitive to the shy, the quiet and the weak of the flock.

How can elders help?

What can elders do to ensure that the local church is an environment in which all believes can blossom into maturity and fruitfulness? Three Scriptures provide a starting point. First, elders must know the state of their flock (Proverbs 27:23), and that includes an awareness of those who may need extra help to simply survive.

Second, elders must be convinced that this is one very important part of their work. Hebrews 13:17 tells us that those who lead "watch for your souls..." (KJV). Many students of the Word believe that in referring to the soul, the Lord is calling attention to the intangible parts of a person such as the mind, will and emotions. True shepherd care for the flock involves the whole person, and this goes beyond spiritual protection from false doctrine or the need for physical safety. So Paul writes to the Corinthians regarding a possible visit from Timothy: "Now if Timothy come, see that he may be with you without fear" (I Cor. 16:10). In order to be secure in a loving fellowship, there must be a freedom from fear, loneliness, isolation, intimidation, harsh criticism, etc.

Most of this is probably common sense. Just as in any family the quieter ones must be drawn out and appreciated and the more vocal one kept from dominating, so it is in God's spiritual family. However, this often neglected aspect of church life is true shepherds' work, and will go a long way toward building an assembly known for warm fellowship and discipleship that reaches out to all.

From the Q-Files

"At Santa Clara University in California, a researcher conducted a study of 1,500 business managers that revealed what workers value most in a supervisor. Employees said they respected a leader who shows competence, has the ability to inspire workers, and is skillful in providing direction.

"But there was a fourth quality they admired even more—integrity. Above all else, workers wanted a manager whose word was good, one who was known for his honesty, and one whom they could trust." *Our Daily Bread*, Oct. 29, 2005.

No less should this finding be true for elders, where our work impacts far more than just a business decision. We may lack skill or the ability to inspire by clever oratory—but we must never compromise on integrity. Take a moment and read Psalm 15, sometimes called the "Integrity Psalm."

A Meek and Quiet Spirit

by Ruth Spender

First Things (cont.)

Why doesn't God take us to heaven as soon as we are saved? I remember wondering about this question as a young Christian. While there may be many reasons, one of His purposes in leaving us here is to conform us to the image of His Son. The process of sanctification is a life long pursuit which is only as successful as our degree of surrender to the Spirit's work in our lives. As we grow, we become more effective in our service for the Lord.

While all believers are called to grow in Christlike character, Peter, in the third chapter of his first epistle, speaks specifically to us as women. He addresses us in two areas where we tend to be different from our male counterparts. One is the tendency to talk when we would do better to be silent and the other is the temptation to spend more time on the outer person than the hidden person of the heart. Peter goes on to say that a meek and quiet spirit is of great value in God's sight.

In order to be effective Christian women, we need to adopt this value system as our own and model it for the younger women we seek to disciple. Keep in mind that everything in the world around us runs counter to these principles. Romans 12:2 reminds us not to become pressed into the world's way of thinking, but to be renewed so that we know God's will for our lives.

The question often arises—what does it mean to be meek? Meekness has been defined as great strength held in

check, meaning that we choose not to lash out when we could. We see this demonstrated by our Lord when He went to the cross. As a lamb led to the slaughter, He opened not His mouth. The world looked at Him as a weakling, but He could have called legions of angels to deliver Him if He had chosen to do so. No, He was not weak; He was meek. To be meek takes great strength of character. It is certainly a supernatural quality, not something we possess naturally.

What does it mean to have a quiet spirit? A quiet spirit results from the firm conviction that God is in complete control of everything in this universe, including our private world. So then, there is no situation or experience that we might encounter but that He is right there with us, having our best interest at heart. There is no need to fear, no desire to manipulate, no satisfaction in answering back with sharp words. Those with a quiet spirit see God work mightily on their behalf, simply because they are so dependent on Him.

No matter what our personality, the Lord wants us to possess a humble meekness and a calm spirit that reflects a close relationship with Him. These character qualities come over time as we nurture the hidden person of the heart by drawing near to the one who was meek and lowly Himself. As we do, He promises that we will find rest for our souls. Now that is the effective way to carry out any work for the Lord.

them, identifying with them and even sharing somewhat of our struggle with sin—and testifying of God's grace to us. Such humility allows God to flow through us, in a sense, to help others see God's grace that can powerfully change them.

Paul desired for Timothy (and for us) the experience of grace from God in daily life, and to experience it to the full. The irony of this is that grace can only be experienced through humility, because grace towards us presumes failure and shortcoming on our part. To the degree that we cannot admit our sin, to that degree we cannot experience God's grace.

Additionally, Paul wants for Timothy to experience peace and mercy. Peace, because leadership of God's people brings a great amount of inner turmoil, self-doubts and personal conflict. Mercy, because leaders frequently make mistakes—and there are many people who will point out your mistakes! When I get discouraged in leading God's people, when I am overcome with my own inadequacies, fears and insecurities—my failures and sinful actions at times—I am reminded of these things. It is only those who embrace God's grace, peace and mercy who stay with it. Someone once said, "Lesser men give up." I don't want to be among lesser men; I want to embrace God's grace in my life, rest in His peace and relish in His mercy. That's what keeps me from throwing in the towel. Paul's message to Timothy—be reassured of God's grace, peace and mercy.



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