



## Biblical Foundations

# Foundation for Confronting Error *by Chuck Gianotti*

*Studies in 2 Timothy—Part 5 (3:16-4:4)*

### Myriad of Interpretations

Many times I have wished God had given more detail on a particular doctrine or application of truth to life where I live. But He did not leave us a library full of systematic doctrine or a compendium of specifically worked out applications to cover every situation we will ever encounter. His Word speaks of God's sovereign will and also speaks of our culpability (or responsibility) for sinful choices. Yet believers have argued about this for two thousand years, and still continue on. And we all are adamant that our respective doctrine or theology is plainly revealed in Scripture – the same Scripture! Why couldn't God have made *my* view more clear to everyone else?!

Then there is the question of whether a Christian is free to drink alcohol, smoke, wear certain styles of clothes, listen to certain kinds of music, lift hands in praise or clap, etc. Let's not even bring up the subject of the

question of contemporary versus traditional music in the church! The rabbinic literature from antiquity shows a concerted effort to

make up for the seeming lack of detailed application with their learned debates that, for instance, detailed out the length of a Sabbath Day's journey and whether burning a meal was sufficient cause for a divorce. In particular, the "authoritative teachings from mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. were compiled into what is called the Mishnah. Specifically, to follow up on one of the above examples, the tractates Ketuboth 5 & 7 detailed in lengthy tomes many specific reasons for a valid divorce, based on debates over Deuteronomy 24:1-4! Such teaching almost became as authoritative as the Scripture itself. I remember one individual attempting to support his doctrinal view point by quoting a hymn from his group's accepted hymnal!

### Keeping Focus

Our goal in Elders' ShopNotes is primarily the specific work of helping equip elders to do their work of shepherding God's people under their care. In the biblical text before us, Paul wrote to Timothy preparing him in *how*

to deal with false doctrine, but he does not get into the specific doctrines themselves (he has written to the church at large in the other portions of Scripture on many specific doctrines).

Previously in this second letter to Timothy, Paul had warned about false teachers. Then he spoke of Timothy's heritage which gave him a solid background in Scripture. Now he instructs Timothy that the Scripture is foundational for all issues of faith, doctrine and even practice. This young disciple must no longer rely only on his mother's or grandmother's faith. In dealing with error the man of God needs to be well studied in the Word of God, not in what others believe. (Many seminaries today — though thankfully not all — spend more time studying what others say about Scripture rather than the Word of God itself!) A spiritual leader among God's people cannot rely for his beliefs on his denominational teaching, but on his own convictions from the first hand engagement of the Word of God.

*At the core of Christian life and ministry is the Word of God, the very divinely-breathed words of the Creator God of the universe.*

You have at some point probably memorized 1 Tim 3:16 (NASB) and rightly so. "All" Scripture—not just some, is in view. It is both inspired (i.e.

theological) and profitable (practical). Scripture is change oriented ("equipping for every good work"). To be sure, doctrine must be founded on the basis of Scripture alone. But it was also given so that we might leave behind dead works and live in righteousness, holiness and grace. It was given so that we would embrace spiritual truth, both in defending right doctrine and also living accordingly in daily life.

So Paul, as strongly as he can, instructs ("solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus") to preach the Word! The original Greek carries a memorable sounding force, "*Kēruckson ton logon!*" At the core of Christian life and ministry is the Word of God, the very divinely-breathed words of the Creator God of the universe. Elders do well to memorize this passage and remind themselves every day of what the essence of "ministry of the Word" is.

*(Continued on page 4)*

# Leadership Principles

## Why a Plurality?

by Jack Spender

**M**any churches today are taking a hard look at the subject of church leadership. Some have been studying the New Testament teachings; others are forced to reconsider because of an “empty pulpit,” and still others have concluded that the conventional system just isn’t working as hoped. To this end, we are beginning a series of articles showing that leadership by a plurality of elders is Biblical, practical and realistic for the church today.

First, why plurality? For many, the simple statements of Scripture and early church practice are sufficient. However, for those who have only known a form of leadership in which the “Pastor” is the both the chief administrator and primary preacher, the question can be “How could things be done any other way?”

There is no question that in the Pastor-centered model of church leadership there are many good men who love the Lord and His people. In many cases, they were raised in denominations knowing no other way. And wherever such men work at spreading the Word, the church can grow.

Without slight on any individual or group, we must consider the possibility that this system of church leadership might actually be the result of spiritual warfare against the truth. Who can name a greater failing within the church throughout history than the multitudes of non-functioning, mute spectators of “religious ministry” called “laity” who look on while the professionally “clergy” carries out the “worship” of the church? How can it be known in such churches that this division into separate classes of “clergy” and “laity” is totally lacking in New Testament support and in fact is opposed to the very heart of the Christian faith — the salvation and maturity and functioning of every true believer?

### The Case for Plurality

**1. The teaching of Christ:** In Matt. 23:8-10, our Lord forbids the taking of religious titles to His followers because “...one is your Teacher, the Christ, and all you are brethren.” The specific mention of the titles Rabbi, father and teacher could well be applied to Jews, Roman Catholics and Protestants, but the point is that ANY title that separates men into a ministerial class is forbidden by the Lord.

**2. The example of the early church:** The normal configuration of local churches in New Testament days is expressed in Phil. 1:1 “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” The word “bishops” is synonymous to “elders.” Note that the descriptions are plural, yet it is one local church in Philippi (e.g., I Thess 5:12; Heb 13:7,17).

**3. The teaching and practice of the apostles:** Paul instructed Titus to “... appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” (Titus 1:5). Revisiting young churches in Galatia, Paul and Barnabas followed a consistent pattern: “So when they had appointed elders in every church ...” (Acts 14:23). Peter gave a special charge to “The elders who are among you....” (I Peter 5:1). There is no hint that without a central figure such as an ordained Minister or Pastor, the church is incomplete. In the letter of James, often thought to be the earliest written epistle, ailing believers were instructed: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church ...” (James 5:14). In all cases, there was a plurality.

**4. The Biblical teaching regarding safety in a plurality:** Prov. 11:14 says: “Where *there is* no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors *there is* safety.”

No matter how wise and godly any man might be, he is nevertheless subject to being deceived and erring in judgment. Some will object that even a king as supreme can have counselors. But it is one thing to solicit wise counsel while reserving the final decision to oneself, and quite another to seek God’s will by praying and working together in a true team toward unanimity or consensus.

**5. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers requires that church leaders be ordinary people and not a separate clergy class.** The spirit and intent of numerous passages such as I Peter 2:5, 9; I Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 4:11-16 and Revelation 1:5-6 assume that every Christian believer is a holy priest with spiritual functions to perform in the church, and that these are not limited to peripheral and non-

essential duties, but to the very heart of fellowship with God and the issues of the assembly.

**6. The confirmation of history:** In the many revivals and reformations, a return to the Word of God and a moving of the Spirit of God have always been accompanied by an increased openness to involvement by ordinary believers. Usually, though, this trend has been partial, and the machinery of organized religious systems has resented intrusion into the “priestly office.”

**7. Practical considerations:** Where religious persecution is formidable, the clergy style of church government cannot prosper. Believers must meet quietly, often in homes and leadership functions are necessarily the responsibility of ordinary working people.

On the other hand, in western evangelicalism, one often sees the disruption caused by a transition in leadership. Contrast the “empty pulpit” with trial sermons preached by candidating applicants imported from afar, with the quiet transition within a leadership team as younger men grow into shepherding and replacing those moving away or going to be with the Lord.

### Opposing arguments “from Scripture”:

Probably the passage most often cited in objection is the leadership of James in Acts 15. There is no question that he provided good leadership. But he was never referred to by any religious title, and he only summarized the conclusions to which all had already come, he didn’t make the decision himself (Acts 15:25 “Having come to one accord”). In the letter written by the counsel, his name was not even mentioned. Rather the salutation was sent from “The apostles, the elders and the brethren...” vs. 23.

That James is mentioned with special honor and respect is easily understandable as being the earthly brother of the Lord Jesus. But this no more proves him to be “the Pastor of the Jerusalem church” than the separate mention of “Mary the mother of Jesus” along with “other women” (Acts 1:14) is grounds for supposing that Mary was the president of the women’s guild in the church!

*Continued on page 3*

# Are You Discipling Others?

by Ruth Spender

**D**o you see yourself as someone who has grown in your faith to a point where you can disciple others? A disciple is a learner or a pupil, one who has a teachable spirit. How can we encourage more women to be disciples?

The Lord Himself is our great example. He chose 12 disciples to work with while He was here on earth. Being God, He could have handled many more, but I believe He was leaving us an example to follow. We weren't meant to take on the world, but rather work faithfully with a few at a time.

How well are we doing at reaching out, forming friendships and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit in this ministry? Are we realistic about what we can handle? We must not forget the great need to disciple our own children and grandchildren. God has put these young disciples in our families so that we might train them to be able to face the spiritual challenges of the future.

I remember my own dear mother who spent much of her life in bed with a crippling disease, faithfully teaching me verses of Scriptures in the morning before I headed off to school. She protected me from many dangers in my young life by helping me hide God's Word in my heart

at a tender age. I reap the benefits of her diligence to this day.

Working with younger women, I find many need accountability and structure especially when getting started. Personally, I find it helpful to touch base with those I have under my care at least twice a month. It's important for them to know that I am available to answer questions, discuss their concerns or take short phone calls. When dealing with spiritual babes, I would certainly want to be in touch more frequently.

Our ladies Bible study provides a great forum for discipleship training during the school year when we meet regularly. It provides an opportunity for us to "provoke one another to love and good works." The goal is to see those you are working with reaching out to bless others. When that happens you know that you are succeeding in your mission.


Let me tell you briefly about three women the Lord has placed in my life. One is a homeless mother with a toddler, who has found temporary housing in the home of a believer. She has many challenges and problems facing her, yet she is eager to be with the Lord's people on Sunday morning and is growing in her new found faith. What a joy it is to

work with one who is so eager to grow.

Another young mom recently approached me for help with her work in the Sunday School. She desires to get a better handle on the Word of God herself so that she can more effectively teach our younger children.

A third young woman I have been spending time with is learning that she cannot hide from God. For many years she has been a closet alcoholic. She tried on several occasions to rehabilitate herself with no success. In a nutshell, she seriously injured another person in a car accident and today she is serving time for her crime. I believe the Lord is finally getting through to this mother. I look forward to a happy ending to her story.

There are various ways to approach this ministry. Simply put, we want to teach others what the Lord has taught us.

We are not called upon to do this work alone. We need to be in regular contact with the great Discipler as we seek to do the work He started here on earth. As I think about discipleship, I wonder from which of the twelve original disciples did I descend? Thank God for faithful men and women down through the ages who passed the spiritual baton on to others. May we be found faithful in our task as we seek to reach out to the next generation. 

## Why a Plurality? (cont. from page 2)

Secondly, Ephesians 4:12 does mention "pastors," but the context is not church leadership, but spiritual gifts. Scripture never confuses spiritual gifts (received at conversion) with leadership positions (earned through years of experience). In fact the only individual in the entire New Testament identified by the noun "pastor" (or "shepherd") is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (1 Peter 5:4).

Finally, some teach that the angels of the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are references to church pastors. But church leaders are never elsewhere called angels (messengers) and there are good words both for pastor and elder, neither of which was chosen by the writer John. Why churches have angelic representatives is a valid question, but how frail is a theological position that must seek church Pastors in references to angels!


### Practical Objections to Plural Leadership

Objections are usually in two areas; 1) it is more difficult to get decisions made when several persons are involved 2) ordinary men have neither the time nor the training to lead the church.

As to the first, if the primary goal in leading the church was speed in decision making, there is no question that a single person can come to unanimity more quickly. But the church is not the corporate world. Opportunities for spiritual growth, warm fellowship, developing listening and communication skills, and waiting on the Lord together for guidance gives advantages to the team approach that far outweigh any disadvantages.

As to the second objection, one must consider the nature and purpose of the church. It is a place where disciples are

made. Men who love the Lord and His people will make time in a busy schedule to study the Word and visit the flock. They are not known and loved because of educational degrees, but simply because of godly wisdom, and sharing with others what they are finding in the Lord personally.

Godly men have raised families, held fulltime secular jobs, and nevertheless functioned effectively as church elders. As part of a working team, each one uses his gift and contributes his part, resulting in a healthy, growing church. No wonder a growing number of churches are making the transition to elder-led churches! 

## Foundation for Confronting Error (cont. from page 1)

The Word of God is the main “tool” we have for dealing with false doctrine: reproving, rebuking, exhorting (4:2). It alone equips us for dealing with the myriad of deceptions God’s people face, and it trains us in how to deal with various situations. We see, for example, from the study of the book of Acts and Paul’s letters, how he dealt with false teaching in different ways and at different times, how he instructed others to deal with error, and how people responded to his confrontations. We learn from him, across almost two millennia. The details in Scripture examples and teaching may not match exactly the issues we face, but immersing ourselves in the Word of God will train and condition us to apply God’s truth with insight, wisdom and integrity.

### Dry Teaching?

Does this justify dry, boring teaching under the guise of “defending the truth?” Not at all! But, as elders we need to work hard at communicating in a way that is understandable and seen to be relevant in our present age. It simply will not do to preach the same words and phrases, and copy the manners and styles of preachers of old, or somehow mentally trying to impress those of a bygone age. We need to help young people, especially, see how Scripture

feeding on solid food, rather than only milk. But God gave shepherds and teachers precisely because most won’t be able to discern the solid food on their own. It is our work (and I emphasize “hard work”) to understand the times that our young men and women live in, and help them see the truth of Scripture in ways they can understand. That means more than just regurgitating or pounding the pulpit harder that they should be more committed and wringing our hands. It requires “patience and instruction” (2 Tim 4:2).

*As elders we need to work hard at communicating in a way that is understandable and seen to be relevant in our present age.*

My prayer is that God would stir elders everywhere to teach sound doctrine—and to do it in ways that speak to the real issues people are facing. Speaking as one who is committed to the Biblical truth of church government by a plurality of biblically qualified el-

### Beware: Your church can be swayed!

Your assembly may be solidly biblical, but it can easily be swayed. There is a kind of spiritual law of entropy, namely that a spiritual body left to itself with no outside force or influence will tend toward spiritual disarray. It was true in the churches Paul established as well. Without continuous input of solid doctrine from Scripture the local gathering of God’s people will soon “... not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled...” (2 Tim 4:3).

addresses the specific issues facing them, which may not be the same ones we faced when we were younger. In some churches, young people and newer believers leave because of endless dissertations on the “gleanings” of Scripture when they need food from the main harvest of the Word of God. If people are bored with the preaching, as one young man confessed to me recently, there is a problem! Of course, the problem might lie with those who are bored. They need to condition their spirits to

ders, if one of ours leaves for a church that holds to a pastor-hierarchy form of government, the issue is not automatically a lack of commitment to biblical truth, but could quite possibly be a lack of good quality teaching in many other areas that connect with younger ears.

I conclude by echoing the apostle Paul: Preach the Word! Not just some of it, but all of it. And do it well.



## THE SMALL PRINT

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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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