



Biblical Foundations Identity and Mission

by Chuck Gianotti

Studies in Titus —Part 1 (1:1 NASB)

We are beginning, in this issue of ESN, a new series of articles based on the Epistle to Titus. This last installment of the Pastoral Trilogy, that includes 1 and 2 Timothy, spells out essential leadership instructions for elders and leaders of the church.

Paul's ministry landed him in jail on numerous occasions (see 2 Tim 1:8, 16). It is believed that he wrote his letter to Titus shortly after being released from his Roman imprisonment (Acts 28). He was certainly incarcerated as he wrote to the Ephesians (and probably Colossians) and Philemon (1, 9, 23). Suffering was his constant bedfellow. A leisurely life was not his.

In Titus 1:1, he refers to himself as a "bond-servant of God," similar to his introduction to the

book of Romans (1:1). The life of a Christian leader is not easy! Suffering is nowhere listed as a requirement or a necessary attendant for spiritual leadership. But it seems, from the biblical examples and from the testimony of godly Christian leaders through the ages, suffering is a common, and I would say, an inevitable attendant to shepherding God's people. We speak not of the arm-chair scholar or the leader "wanna be" who is more interested in the glamor and accolades of the evangelical celebrity-adoring masses. Nor do we speak of the self-exalting critic who has read a dozen books on leadership and attended the invogue leadership conference, and therefore feels qualified to sit in judgment over the servants of God who are struggling on the front lines of spiritual warfare.

Paul's leadership, yes, landed him in prison—and he never complained. He wore his circumstances as an identifying badge. Throw him in the slammer, and he puts it on his chest—not only did he preach Jesus Christ, he was God's "bond-servant." To be sure, he speaks on one level of his spiritual service to the Master. But he relished in the most earthly of experiences. For Paul, though he focused on things unseen rather than that which is seen, he viewed his very earthly experiences in light of an "eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor 4:17-18). So, throw a stone at him, he could easily see himself as a Paul who is stoned for Christ. Or if he is beaten, his faith led him to take on another, expanded identify – Paul, who is a beaten one for Christ. So, Paul is a bond-servant for God.

In case the reader is tempted to mollify

his senses by emphasizing, as some preachers like to do, the favored treatment Paul at times received, read Paul's own testimony of his life struggles for the gospel (2 Cor 4:7-12, 11:23-29). It was decidedly *not* easy. He was not just a *diaconos* (the Greek word for one who serves another, see 2 Cor 11:23), he was more. In fact, he was a *doulos* (the Greek word for a bond-servant or slave, Titus 1:1). This is the Paul that writes to Titus. He was a "bond-servant of God." That is the kind of person he was. He speaks of leadership out of the constrained suffering of the spiritual trenches of ministry. He is one who knows the loss of comfort, privilege, freedom of movement, time and energy. A slave. A bond-

servant is one who chooses to be a slave. All his limitations were simply the constraints of serving his God. That's who he was, a bond-

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because He wants you to.
Nothing more, nothing less.*

servant of God.

He was also "an apostle of Jesus Christ." His mission remained the same from his earliest ministry (see Acts 14:14—his first missionary journey and Galatians 1:1—probably his earliest writing). He was a "sent one" for that is what the term "apostle" means. He was sent by Christ (read Acts 9:15-16, Gal 1:15, 2:7). He kept on task, never swaying. He represented Christ as His ambassador (2 Cor 3:20-21). An old preacher told a struggling young preacher, "Was you sent, or did you went?" Paul was sent.

So Paul knew who he was (bond-servant of God) and he knew his mission (represent Christ). His life teaches us well at this point. What great truths are revealed in just this portion of a verse, Titus 1:1! What Peter tells the elders, "to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3), Paul does for his young mentoree. He, the apostle, is the example. If we are to emulate his example, as the Holy Spirit directs us to do no less than four times in inspired Scripture (see Phil 3:17, 4:9, 1 Cor 4:16, 1 Cor 11:1), then the challenge really needs not be made by this writer. But, my fellow elders, do you know who you are and what your mission is? If you are called to be an elder, remember you are "called." It is not something you decided to do of yourself, on your own. Remember it well, don't ever forget it! No amount of money, no human praise, can justify what an elder called of God has to "put up with."

You serve at "God's pleasure," because He wants you to. Nothing more, nothing less.

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Leadership Principles

Elders Emeritus

by Jack Spender

One of the most endearing qualities of godly older men, especially church elders, is that gentle smile, kind word and gracious acceptance of the younger generation coming along. There is something remarkably Christ-like in one who, having served well, does not consider past accomplishments “a thing to be grasped” (see Phil 2:6), but quietly lays aside rightful honors and works instead to make younger ones successful. The church needs men like this.

In seeking a suitable description for such men, let’s consider the term “elders emeritus.”

Definition

Poking around a few online dictionaries yielded some interesting results. From the Latin, the word “emeritus” means “to serve out one’s term.” It is most often used of professionals like university professors and is usually given upon retirement. However, I did discover two facts that are noteworthy. For one thing, full retirement may not be required but the individual might continue to exercise some duties; the other, that the individual so described is being honored as one “respected and distinguished.”

Think of it—older men who can still function in a limited way being honored and accorded a distinguished place in the life of the church. What a formula for blessing! That means that assembly eldership might consist both of younger men who are serving “in active duty,” and older men who are held in honor and available for consultation even though no longer able to work at full capacity as they once did!

The scenario is not uncommon, but the terminology can be a barrier. In conventional thinking, to remain an elder, a man must struggle to “keep up” when health and stamina are waning, or he must “step down” (or “aside;” all sorts of creative terms are employed!) which can be heart wrenching for one who still has a lot to offer. Why not refer to such a brother as an elder emeritus?

Benefits

Of course for such an idea to work, several things would need to be in place. Older elders would need to be

humbly realistic about their limitations and willing to transition to a reduced schedule, sending a gentle message to the younger men of the assembly; perhaps something like this: “I won’t be around forever, you know, and I’d love to pass on the baton of leadership and work along side you, and encourage you while I still can.”

Contrast that with the defensive and self-protecting inflexibility of a man who can no longer do the work of an elder but cherishes the title. I remember a small, struggling assembly where the younger folks proposed a schedule change that would benefit the

Holding open discussions about the age and responsibilities for the “elder emeritus” can make transitioning a time of rejoicing and continuing fruitfulness.

families. One veteran elder was heard to remark: “They’ll do that over my dead body,” and so they did, but the added years of waiting until the man finished his course did not help the church.

On the other hand, the younger men need to be willing to take up the burden of leadership and relieve those who have served faithfully for years, not forgetting to honor them by asking counsel or accepting exhortations when given. Much assembly work is fairly routine, such as preaching the Word, decision making and caring for the saints by visiting them and praying for them. But in times of crisis brought about by serious moral or doctrinal challenges, it is comforting to count on the support of those who may no longer be active but can stand together and face the opposers.

Finally, the support of the whole assembly to such an idea would be important. Some people, to be sure, are suspicious of change, even the use of new or unfamiliar words. But it is no small blessing when such become satisfied that as long as biblical principles remain steadfast - in this case, a true plural leadership - the church has liberty to implement ideas that will enhance clear communication and the equipping of the saints.

The Practical Outworking

Once a healthy transition in leadership is taking place (with or without the term “emeritus” in question), working out the details can be straightforward. Two areas bear watching: personal attitudes and serving relationships.

As to the former, the Scripture is clear, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” (Phil 2:3 NKJV). Both the older and the younger must practice this outlook. Younger men can ask themselves, “What must it be like to give your life to build something, and then hand it

over to younger people who may ‘mess up’?” Also the question, “How would I want to be treated when I am nearing the end of the race?” Older ones can be asking: “Honestly, did I make all the right moves

when I was getting started?” “Was the Lord patient and forgiving with me in my learning process?”

Serving relationships can be even more of a challenge. The tendency for older, more experienced men is to “pull rank” and start commanding the younger men. It takes real grace to stand by patiently while less than ideal decisions are being made. Many blessings can come from meditating on the way the Lord Jesus worked with His disciples—His patience, His love “to the uttermost” (John 13:1), His praying for them and then at the end, He speaks about them to the Father and has only good things to say (John 17)! We must remember that the growth of the servant is usually more important to God than the task being undertaken.

Obstacles

Why is this matter of passing the baton so difficult? How can good men spend the better part of a lifetime in leadership and not be able to let go? These are searching questions without simple answers. Here are some suggestions that may be useful in discussion.

Don’t wait for a situation to become an embarrassment. Begin years in advance to prepare for a reduced schedule for older elders and for the bringing in of younger men. Holding open discussions about the age and responsibilities for the

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The Crown of Glory

by Ruth Spender

The book of Proverbs is like a mirror filled with images and illustrations that help us see and understand ourselves as wives. The contrast between the godly woman and the woman of the world is hard to miss, as the gap widens daily.

Recently, as I approached the book of Proverbs, the Lord let me know that I was moving much too quickly through my morning devotions. I realized that time was needed to reflect and ponder on the truths I was seeking to take in. The question is asked, implying this kind of person is indeed rare, "A wife of noble character who can find?"

We are all well acquainted with the list of virtues that are used throughout Scripture to define the godly woman. She is one who is first and foremost obedient to the Lord, as well as faithful in her duties, caring for others, and dili-

gently working at whatever her hand finds to do. Titus 2:4 reminds us that along with these good qualities, she has a loving relationship with her husband. She delights to see him respected in the community and she will even go so far as to cover his failings!

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Not one of us can keep up with these qualifications without the Lord's help. We need to daily seek His face before we face our day, if we desire to be effective in our work for God.

We often focus our attention on the Proverbs 31 woman, but more recently I have been thinking about the virtuous wife of Proverbs 12:4. There we read that this woman is a crown to her husband. What does that mean? A crown is

a very distinctive treasure with lovely qualities. It is a precious and beautiful ornament that is highly prized. Crowns are mentioned in connection with rewards in the New Testament, but this crown is for wives only.

Women may wear a beautiful wedding band, or a gold chain around their necks, but this ornament outshines them all. It is not that the Proverbs 12:4 woman has a crown. Rather she as an individual is her husband's crown and he wears that crown with distinction as his brightest ornament. This dovetails beautifully with Paul's teaching that "the woman is the glory of the man."

May you and I be encouraged to continually seek the welfare of our men as we partner together in the work of the Lord.



Elders Emeritus (continued from page 2)

"elder emeritus" can make transitioning a time of rejoicing and continuing fruitfulness. Even elders must be reminded from the Word that they are to find their security in the Lord so that handing over the reins to others is not viewed as a denial of personal worth.

Various practical measures can support the process. It's a blessing when younger men are invited to sit in on an elders' meeting and even discuss their feelings about one day being recognized as elders. Planning times of special honor for those who are distinguished as elders emeritus along with their wives is in keeping with biblical instructions about honoring the older members of any society.

Many assemblies are resistant to the idea of "congregational review" of leaders, thinking that God put them in place, so He alone can make changes. But how can elders teach accountability to younger men (a critical aspect of discipleship!) if they themselves are not open to change and correction? There are many examples in Scripture of how God leads either to confirm or to rebuke leaders through people who are simply "speaking the truth in love." No elder should be afraid of constructive criticism. Done in the right spirit, an annual

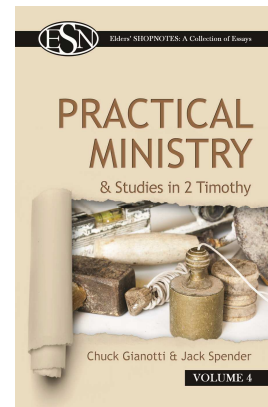
time for listening to the flock on subjects like "Who qualifies?" "Who is doing the work?" etc. can be a true blessing to the church.

Conclusion

There are many ways to make the whole subject of leadership in the church a thing of beauty and of blessing. But if we hear younger men saying, "I'm glad to serve but I don't want the title" or "I don't want to meet with those men," we know that leadership is not healthy and the future of that assembly may be in jeopardy. Yet in the Lord, "Where there's life, there's hope." Dealing with the question of aging elders is just one way to bring hope, but it's a crucial one.



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Identity and Mission (cont. from page 1)

That is sufficient motivation and His praise is sufficient reward (Matt 25:21). His pleasure for you is to “guard the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). With that comes suffering. You are a bond-servant of God. Your responsibility, your burden (2 Cor 11:28), your passion is that which the Lord loves, namely His church.

True, when Peter tells the elders to not serve under compulsion (1 Peter 5:2),

he uses the same English word as we are using here. But, the point is not to serve reluctantly as though only by cold-obedience, kicking and screaming, as it were, complaining and whining. Rather, elders are to serve “willingly” – it is that sort of compulsion Paul speaks of in 2 Cor 5:14—being willingly compelled by the love of God! Thus, Paul speaks of himself as a bond-servant with no sense of remorse or complaint or even a sigh. He wears that identification badge willingly. He will gladly suffer, because the

love of Christ compels him. Truly Paul is a man under compulsion. Are you, my fellow elder?

I would encourage you to get alone with God and evaluate your heart and your will. Ask Him to shine His Holy Spirit of conviction into your soul. Our life of service for Him is way too short to get this wrong. Join me in recommitting to being His bond-servant and His ambassador.



From the Q-File

Change is difficult—that is for certain. But resistance to change, when it does not involve doctrinal truth, can stagnate the church, even when such resistance comes under the guise of being “faithful.” Many churches have driven away their youth because of this tendency.

I recently heard an elder tell me about a change they were making in his assembly. A brother from another assembly said to him, “How do you get away with that. Our elders would never go for such a thing!” The change he was speaking of had nothing to do with doctrine, but the order of a meeting. Too much conflict entirely has been spent on such stuff. No wonder young people leave churches like that.

Here is a point I would like to make. In our desire to guard the church (Acts 20:28), we must not mistake all change as an attack on the truth. It is entirely too easy for a “traditionalist” (which I define as one who holds on to traditional ways of doing things, for the sake of tradition *only*, and not for

the truth—and to hold it with an iron fist)—it is too easy for a traditionalist to rally the faithful against change by making the agent of change to be an enemy of the truth.

This is a worldly technique that certainly has its appeal and its desired effect. Witness this quote from Hermann Wilhelm Göring, the Nazi leader and one-time second in command to Hitler:

“Naturally, the common people don't want war; neither in Russia nor in England nor in America, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy or a fascist dictatorship or a Parliament or a Communist dictatorship ... voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in

any country.” (Quoted in Wikipedia, Ref: Gilbert, G. (1995). *Nuremberg Diary*. New York: Da Capo Press. Pp. 278–279.)

Not all change is inspired by the devil, nor is it all a result of shunning biblically mandated principles. Nor is all clamor for change simply the work of stubborn promoters of worldly religious movements. Blessed is that assembly of God's people and their leaders who can bring change that is good and helpful and refreshing, that adapts to the needs of the people, rather than attacking those who suggest it.

“Oh, Lord, preserve us from using such worldly tactics in our shepherding of Your people. Amen.”



Note: To understand better Why People Resist Change, see the article by that name in Elders' ShopNotes, Volume 1, Number 6, which you can find in the online archives at www.bible-equip.org/esn.

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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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