



Editor's Note

Have you checked out the new website, www.BiblicalEldership.com? It is full of resources for elders, potential elders and young men. You can find this ministry on Twitter (@eldership) and Facebook (BiblicalEldershipResources) as well, and BER has a regular blog on topics related to eldership issues. Videos, audios, outlines – for every style of learning, covering “What is Biblical Eldership?” and “How to become more effective as an elder.” Great for individual use, but also designed for group discussion. Check it all out online.

Biblical Foundations Teaching That Impacts

by Chuck Gianotti

Studies in Titus —Part 7 (Titus 2:11–15 NASB)

How can we achieve balance in teaching for our churches? Which topics should take priority? Some say always preach the gospel in all your teaching. Others emphasize Christian living, prophecy, or fighting the contemporary theological errors of our day. Some go for verse-by-verse exposition, taking years to work through the book of Romans, for example. How can we keep balance? What is the wise equilibrium of teaching?

In our passage for this article, we are given four things to focus on, and we elders will do well in the 21st century to follow this instruction carefully. As Paul continues to instruct Titus, he explicitly charges him to disseminate these instructions to others: “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority” (vs. 15, see also Titus 2:1 and 2 Tim 2:2). “These things” are not so much specific sermon topics, but concepts that should always be conveyed, regardless of the specific week-by-week teaching. I believe keeping these in mind will go a long way toward balanced teaching.

1. Grace

We need to saturate our teaching with the message of grace! Have you noticed, every one of Paul’s letters begins with “grace to you” within the first verses? He ends every letter with grace as well. Sometimes he includes “peace” and sometimes “mercy,” but without exception, he desires for his readers to have a life bookended by and filled with grace. By grace we are saved, beginning our Christian lives (a great message for the unsaved to receive *and* for the saved to appreciate), but also by grace we are kept in our Christian lives (the energy of sanctification in our lives). As we received Christ Jesus, so we are to walk in Him (Col 2:6)—and that means walking in grace!

As elders we often find it difficult to

draw the right balance in our teaching of living by grace and of exercising the self-denial that comes next in our passage. If we get this wrong, then we lead the people of God (however inadvertently) into legalistic living on the one hand or undisciplined behavior on the other. The evidence of these is either an unhealthy over-emphasis on what Christians must do in order to “think and be right” or a constant railing *against* legalism without a sense of Christian responsibility. Paul’s emphasis here, though, is on grace. Maybe this is because of the natural inclination of the religious heart toward legalism.

“For the grace of God has appeared... instructing us ...” (Titus 2:11-12a). The various doctrines and applications we learn from the study of the Word and teach to others are not intended to be a Christianized version of the Law, which requires conformity. They rather are meant to draw us close to God and away from those things which enslave us. Remember what our Lord Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32). The “truth” here includes both the way of salvation and also the way of life that salvation brings.

Teaching right doctrine means showing people how the truth of that doctrine helps set them free or, to put it another way, how to live the life of grace. The next verse (vs. 12) gives a practical application of what to do with the truth. But we dare not miss the point—whatever is to be said about application, we must saturate it with the understanding of grace! God is no less gracious to us now that we are saved than when we were sinners, alienated, dead in our sins and citizens of the darkness. Now that we are children of God, how much more can we enjoy His grace in our daily lives? He continually invites us into His throne room of “grace” and “mercy” (Heb 4:16).

Can people tell from our teaching on

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Elders ShopNotes has always been about helping people by helping those who lead people. I don't often do this, but I'd like to devote this article to a conversation I had recently (and unexpectedly) with an elder who lives in a different part of the country.

During our conversation, I happened to ask him how things were going in the work where he lives. I did this half expecting the usual reply from an elder in a small assembly that has been small for a long time, and the word "struggling" might have been spoken in the past. It's an old story; a handful of faithful saints; a couple of good, godly elders trying to keep things afloat - and even make some progress but "just when someone new comes in and seems promising, someone else leaves. . ." Over the years, it can be discouraging.

What I was about to hear was surprising; might I say (in a good sense) even shocking! Thus, this article.

Before proceeding, I want to reassure the reader of the motive in which I write. It is certainly not to promote a certain "method," nor any "quick fix." It is not to praise any man or assembly. It is to share with any who may be interested in an account of how the Lord has worked in a situation where those who lead decided to move beyond simply orthodox doctrine and traditional meeting schedules, into the area of active discipleship - even a bit of "thinking outside the box." How better can we glorify the Lord than to build up His bride - the church?

Our Conversation

His opening answer to my question was "Things are going really well; better than they have for a long time." I wanted to hear more.

I'll summarize his report. Last year, the elders came to a decision to become more proactive in discipling people; they decided to begin with a few younger men. This decision was not without some challenges. First, they needed to admit that the way they had always done things wasn't work-

ing. It certainly kept the meetings going, but that was about all. As a missionary friend likes to say, "Admitting the problem is 51% of the solution!"

Second, they realized that they couldn't make needed changes with every age group at the beginning, so they chose to work with the young men of the assembly. These were still flexible and were looking to be challenged for the Lord.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle was to find credible, helpful material that they could use with the men. This would need to be Christ centered, biblically grounded, interesting, and intensely practical. This was discovered

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on an internet website (www.BiblicalEldership.com) geared to help elders with just such a task. "Sure, we're students of Scripture," he told me, "but we needed help as we had neither the time nor ability to write new study materials. Why reinvent the wheel if someone has already done the work?"

A simple plan including meetings with the elders and opportunities to practice was developed. Nothing highly unusual, just older brothers meeting with younger brothers with a healthy dose of accountability. Words and promises alone would not do; there needed to be self-discipline, hard work, and the willingness to apply what was learned (and possibly fail!). A loving, nurturing atmosphere would be the foundation of it all.

Above All We Ask or Think

The idea caught on, and proved to be a huge blessing. Others got involved. The elders opened up time for trial messages by the younger men on Sunday morning. In time, one of the wives asked if the women might serve

the effort by providing a meal on the night of the study. That brought couples and even families together. Growth became evident.

All this is refreshing, but does it move "beyond what we could ask or think?" Listen to what my friend told me next: "This past Sunday for the first time ever, not one of the older men participated in worship; there simply wasn't time. The younger men were filled to overflowing, and that's what they did. We sat and gave thanks to the Lord."

Strong Leadership

The wise reader will remember immediately that the adversary will be active where God is at work. It is inevitable that potential problems will arise. Part of good leadership means foreseeing evil and where possible, making provision to counter it. I found some humor in one of his examples. He said, "After a while, I made an announcement on a Sunday morning that the saints should help and not

hinder our work with these young men," which by now was numbering about 15. "If you have words of praise or commendation following a message spoken by one of them, go ahead and speak to them directly. But if you have any criticism or complaint, please come and speak to one of the elders. We're putting a lot of time and hard work into this, and we'll have no drive-by shootings in this assembly."

He mentioned one other benefit of all this: "Most of our Sunday ministry from the platform is now done by the men of this assembly. Speakers coming in from outside is the exception, not the rule."

Final Thoughts

One rejoices to hear accounts of the blessing of God anywhere, but especially in places where the ground has seemed dry for years. As I thought about the conversation, a few words came to mind. "**Humility**" - the willingness of elders to face and admit that all was not well. "**Teachability**" - the elders' willingness to look out into the

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Cat Food and Plastic Containers

by Mary Gianotti

She was six feet from the sidewalk, an expansive parking lot and a busy highway. Nestled under the bushes lining the doctor's office sat a mallard duck on her nest. Two plastic containers with water and cat food, had been placed next to her. Do ducks eat cat food? Something obviously was not right with this scene.

Another day in another place, while paddling the calm waters of a remote lake in northern Ontario, I saw a pair of mallards skim the silvery water. This seemed the way God intended things to be.

When ministering to God's people, we need to aim for serving as God intended. Often we settle for plastic containers, and a quick, easy self-satisfying way of serving others. But Scripture is clear, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit..." (Phil 2:3). As Paul introduces that wonderful description of Christ the humble Servant in Philippians 2:5-11, he highlights our propensity to be selfish in serving others.

Selfishness is often subtle. We can miss the fact we are serving, as it were, cat food to people rather than what they

really need. Physical, emotional and spiritual needs are real and often raw. Most women are pretty good at meeting the physical needs of believers. Dropping off a meal or doing housework for the elderly is not too difficult. We can fit it into our busy lives

strength requires putting our own needs and selfishness aside.

Spiritual needs run deep. A miner may detect gold on the surface but it requires time and work, digging to reveal the treasure below. Each woman in our fellowships is a treasure. Often the rubble of their lives keeps us from seeing

that. The entryway to a woman's spiritual life is often through meeting physical and emotional needs.

As we do this a friendship of trust is developed, opening the way to effecting spiritual change. Praying with individuals, rather than saying, "I will pray for you," is meeting a

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spiritual need. Offering encouragement from the Word or studying Scripture together is serving like Christ.

"He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant..." (Phil 2:7). The Lord offers to meet our physical, emotional and spiritual needs. In turn He calls us to follow His example and be a channel for meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of others.

ESM

Training a New Generation of Elders (continued from page 2)

body of Christ at large for assistance (which is again, a mark of humility). And "Accountability" - the commitment to be sure that words spoken are carried out.

One thing this brother did *not* say when I questioned him was, "God is good." Now we all know that God is good; Scripture tells us so. But I have always felt a little uncomfortable when the goodness of God is given as the reason for sudden blessing in the work. Why? Because it seems to imply that God is not so good in places where things are not happening; and of course that's not true.

We can't make rules about how or when or where the Lord will work, but we should always suspect some failure or neglect on our part, rather than an unwillingness to act on God's part. A

case in point is the account of those in Acts 11:19 - 26 who went everywhere "preaching the word to . . . the Jews only." We read, "And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord." What happened here? Most of them limited their work to the way in which they had always worked. But a few (perhaps remembering the words of the Lord Jesus "Go into all the world . . .") spoke to Gentiles, and saw immediate blessing.

Are these not good things to ponder in our day as we seek to "strengthen the things that remain"?

ESM

From the Q-File

From the "Interesting Historical Facts" folder: "The Friends (i.e. early Quakers under the first leadership of John Fox 1624-1691) refused to swear oaths or tithes or bow to their betters - they insisted on using the familiar "thou" instead of the respectful "you". Taken from "131 Christians Everyone Should Know." Hmm, I wonder how they addressed God?

ESM

Teaching That Impacts (cont. from page 1)

Sunday mornings and other times that we are big on grace? Do they sense a warm, accepting welcome at our assemblies?

2. Self-denial

As elders, in addition to grace, we need to instruct people in self-denial. This is a gracious thing. These are not incompatible concepts. Inherent to all human beings is the constant pull inwardly, to live and think in self-gratifying ways, all of which enslave us. In the truest sense, grace protects us from ourselves. And as shepherds of the flock, we need to show believers how that works. This means not just telling people to stop doing something or laying on a guilt trip. But it means helping people to understand why certain behaviors and attitudes take away our freedom in Christ and enslave us. Grace instructs us about these things as well. Practical applications help people to understand these things. We need to show, for example, how selfishness can alienate people from others and imprison them in loneliness. Dishonesty can gain a person something in the short term, but can develop into a dungeon of distrust. As elders we need to be creative in studying and presenting the relationship between grace and self-denial in our contemporary world.

Some might say at this point that we need to tell people they are offending God and He is angry with them (and so are we). But, God's anger for our sin (past, present and future) has

been fully poured out on our Savior. Grace is still greater than all of our sin. We are not commanded to enter His throne room of judgment, but of grace. The Bema seat of Christ is coming, to be sure. But getting ready for that is not to live by the Christianized law, but to live by grace through faith. So, all of our calling people to self-denial must still be bathed in grace!

But the other side of self-denial is to replace that which we disallow ourselves: we should focus on living sensible lives, righteous lives, and godly lives, as verse 12 points out. A good portion of our teaching should be showing *how* right doctrine helps people live their practical lives.

3. Hope

Life is hard. Very few, if any, make it through to the end without some significant hardships or losses or sacrifice. People need the message of hope - that God is greater than any problem they have—because He will ultimately take every problem away. A person can keep going over the short term with the prospect that the difficulty will be short-lived. However, many difficulties in life are simply not resolved here on this side of eternity. The pain and struggle goes on and we have to learn how to live with that. Day after day, month after month, year after year – that can be quite hard. The grand motivation for the Christian is the Hope that we have, the

confident expectation of Christ's return in glory. As elders we need to keep reminding people of that, creating anticipation through hope-filled messages.

4. Purpose

Knowing the ultimate end motivates us, but also knowing God's plan for us here gives us purpose for living now. That purpose is to first of all redeem us from human religious efforts (vs. 14a), but also to set us apart for doing good things (vs. 14b). Our purpose should be to line up with His purpose for us. His Spirit is at work "purifying" us so that we become zealous in our walk in grace. That is an internal work, not the result of being badgered from the pulpit. As elders, we need to remind people of a higher calling than just obeying the rules. That's what Paul meant when he wrote, "Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:12).

As elders and leaders of God's people following Paul's teaching to Titus, we should saturate our teaching with grace, self-discipline, hope and purpose. This is the apostolic mandate from the Spirit of God. And this is teaching that will draw people to Christ.



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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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