



Editor's Note

Fifteen Years of publishing Elders' ShopNotes! This ministry began as an outgrowth of "elder training" meetings for 12 men in 1996, in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, in an effort to provide ongoing help in the practical aspects of shepherding God's people. Now we have an international subscription base of close to 1,000 individuals receiving ESN, including in Spanish. We are greatly encouraged by the long and wide reach God has given us.

I have had the ultimate privilege of serving as founder and editor of ShopNotes. But the Lord is now moving me away to other ministries. To that end I am bringing my involvement in ESN to a conclusion as of this issue. In the will of the Lord, you will see ESN being published in the new year under new leadership. Stay tuned for an announcement as details are being worked out.

We celebrate those who have helped make ESN happen. First, my wife Mary, who besides her regular contribution to Wives' Corner has served as "general counsel," chief folder, mailer, stamp licker and runner, particularly in the early days of ESN before it went digital. Jack & Ruth Spender have consistently written articles through the

years from the very beginning and have been great co-workers in this labor of love. Daniel Masuello has capably overseen the Spanish version with various translators along the way: Carl Lehmann, Andrew Rennie and John Field. Ruth Rodger has been our faithful text editor and Sherri Jason has been indispensable in the latter years handling the layout, printing, emailing and snail-mailing. Crawford Paul (of mySonlight) provided technical support and webhosting. I praise the Lord for those who have given generously to make sure each issue of ESN got published.

For those interested, I will be redirecting my time to the ministry of www.BiblicalEldershipResources.com (BER), a comprehensive and collaborative effort to provide resources, teaching and interactive video-based resources, along with conferences, webinars and consultations to help elders, potential elders and men worldwide to grow in their leadership and shepherding abilities.

Thank you to all who have shared your encouraging comments over the years. To God be the glory! Chuck Gianotti

Leadership Principles Final Words

by Chuck Gianotti

Most of what we know about eldership comes from the inspired words of the apostle Paul. His teaching and practice is recorded by Luke in the book of Acts and by his own pen (primarily in his letters to Timothy and Titus). Peter adds a few verses in 1 Peter 5 and we also find some oblique references in Acts related to the church in Jerusalem. God has blessed us with an abundance of guidance on how a local church should be ordered and function. Paul's first writing was probably the book of Galatians (which makes no reference to elders), written as early as A.D. 48 and his last, the second letter to Timothy (A.D. 66-67). That is unless Hebrews was written by Paul, as the consensus of the 2nd and 3rd century church held and a few lone voices today hold (the details of that discussion are beyond the scope of this article).

The last words he apparently wrote make a fitting conclusion to this 15th year of publication of *Elders' ShopNotes*. Paul writes the final charge to his faithful and favored understudy, Timothy. Then he pens his self-assessment of the life of service about to be completed. Finally he acknowledges the Lord's enabling that made his ministry possi-

ble. And I would like to share these thoughts with you, the readers of ESN.

Final Charge

"I solemnly charge you ... preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:1-2)

First, he wears his heart on his writing sleeve. "Preach the Word." In the Greek, it is every bit as punctuated and terse as in the English. "Kerukson ton logon!" After all his teaching and caring for the people of God spread across the eastern Mediterranean, the thing that causes his heart to beat is this "solemnly" given charge. Three words, each important, each essential. "Preach the Word!"

First, "*Preach*." This is proclamation with authority. We distinguish teaching as that which explains, instructs, and helps people to understand. Teaching appeals to the mind with information and understanding. Preaching, on the other hand, address the soul; it commands the will. Preaching is the one-way traveling of truth from the Holy Spirit to the listener, through the mouthpiece of the preacher. "Preach!" he challenges Timothy. Don't apologize, don't demur, don't equivocate. Preach with power, preach with

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Biblical Foundations Studies in Acts—Part 1

by Jack Spender

The Primitive Church

There is no reference to the church in the Old Testament. When we come to the gospels, the Lord speaks of it as something still future: “I will build my church” (Matt 16:18 KJV).

In the epistles, we find instructions to existing churches with a plural leadership already in place, something assumed rather than defended. The early book of James counsels sick people to “call for the elders of the church” (James 5:14); Paul writes to the saints at Philippi “with the bishops and deacons” (Phil 1:1), and Titus is instructed to “appoint elders in every city . . .” (Titus 1:5). Two letters supply extensive lists of qualities that help young churches to recognize elders (I Tim 3; Titus 1). Clearly, a bridge is needed to help us understand the connection between the gospels and the epistles. The book of Acts is that bridge.

In coming articles, I would like to consider the development of church leadership in the book of Acts, especially the six passages that make specific reference to elders (or “overseers”), with the goal of seeing the big picture rather than an over-occupation with fine details. That big picture would be not only a better understanding of the transition from the Lord’s apostles to church elders, but also the value of God’s design for Biblical leadership. Not just a defense of plurality but a sort of flavor of how that plurality looked and functioned in those early days, which of course has strong implications for the church today.

Two added notes about the basic method I will employ:

1) Some students of the Word are unimpressed by “arguments from silence,” and of course these cannot be pressed. However, believing the Acts to be more than simply an historical record of what took place, but part of the church’s manual of instruction for centuries to come, (“all scripture . . . is profitable for doctrine” II Tim 3:16), observations of things NOT said by the writer, and things he seemed to assume can help us understand what he meant.

2) I like to include what might be called “miscellaneous observations” along the way, things that may or may not bear directly on the subject at hand,

but may be of interest to some readers as elements somehow related to that “bigger picture.” The reader should feel free to simply pass them by, being assured that significant points will become unmistakable.

Overview

The Acts of the Apostles (the book’s full name) was written by a man named Luke who wrote the gospel of Luke. Likely a Gentile and a medical doctor, he was a gifted historian committed to truthfulness in content, and accuracy in methodology.

Clearly, a bridge is needed to help us understand the connection between the gospels and the epistles. The book of Acts is that bridge.

Many have pointed out that the particular wording of the Great Commission given by the Lord Jesus as recorded by Luke in the Acts (1:8) gives a clue, if not the key to the entire book. The gospel would begin in Jerusalem and go out in ever widening circles to the ends of the earth.

Trying to divide the book into sections also suggests that Luke, as a good historian, wanted to answer the primary questions new converts would eventually ask: “How did the churches begin?” “Who were the important names in the early days, and what happened to the apostles?” “How did the message spread?” and “Where did Paul come from and how did things go for him?”

Here is a simple chapter outline that shows four of the major goals Luke had in writing:

- I. The primitive (earliest) church 1 - 7
- II. Important people 8 - 12
- III. Missionary work 13 - 20
- IV. Paul’s latter days 21 - 28

The Origin of the Church

Using the four-point outline above, we can summarize the origin and leadership of the earliest churches covered in the first section. After the ascension of the Lord back to heaven, the disciples waited about 10 days in Jerusalem, gathered in an upper room for prayer and fellowship. Chapter 2 records the com-

ing of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and Peter’s great message to the Jews who had come to Jerusalem for the festival. Several thousand people responded with faith in the Lord and were baptized. The church had begun!

In the weeks that followed, the apostles would preach the word, undergo persecution, display God’s power through mighty miracles, and see phenomenal growth of the church as thousands more were saved. The Lord kept adding to the church “daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). In this section, we need only make a few brief observations on the subject of leadership.

Leadership in the early church

In the providence of God, the apostles had a very visible part in the birth of the church. God authenticated them as His representatives or spokesmen for this new “called out company,” which is the literal meaning of the Greek word for church. During this time, the work was confined

to the city of Jerusalem, and the apostles were the undisputed leaders of the church.

It wasn’t long before the devil started to oppose the work both in the persecution of the apostles from outside, and more importantly, difficulties rising up from within the professing community of believers. It is interesting that the first two internal problems that the church faced were both essentially about money; one by a scheming couple in chapter five; the other by neglected widows in chapter 6.

Both of these potential threats to the young work were quickly resolved by timely leadership decisions of the apostles. It is significant that according to the record in Acts 6, the apostles quickly acknowledged the problem, saw it as stemming from the expansion of the work (6:1), and appointed younger men to assist them.

The Lord confirmed this delegation of authority by the public laying on of hands by the apostles, and then by enabling the seven chosen men to perform miracles similar to those being done by the apostles. Yet there is not the slightest hint of jealousy or the desire to retain exclusive rights to such power and position displayed by the apostles. Nor did they seek to continue their number (i.e., apostolic succession) but called them servants which is the root word for deacon.

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Studies in Acts—part 1 (continued from page 2)

These facts help us to understand the mindset of the original apostles. As the work grew, leadership would be needed and was welcomed. Having been part of a working plurality for over 3 years in company with the Lord Jesus who chose them, it was natural for them to continue this pattern.

Before we move into the second

section of the outline (“Some important people, chapters 8 – 12”), it will be helpful to take a closer look at those “elder-assistants,” the original deacons appointed in Acts 6. There is no record that any of them went on to become church elders, but there are some valuable insights on the general subject of church leader-

ship that should not be missed.

In any case, the early conclusion is justified: the Lord did not leave His church as orphans. As promised, He would come to them and they would recognize His character and shepherd care in those He was raising up to be men of influence in the churches.

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Final Words (continued from page 1)

passion and preach with conviction. Some churches have many evangelists, many have teachers, but all should have those who “Preach,” those who proclaim God’s truth.

The second term is, “Word.” The content of preaching is not opinion or theory. What the man of God is to preach is the Word! It is in the Word that there is power. To be sure the Word needs to be explained and shown to be relevant to our present day. But the Word needs to be preached. Not the traditions of men, not the fads of the multitude. It is not the regurgitation of pithy phrases or shibboleths designed to appease the men of power among us. It is the Word, the Logos. It is preaching the written word and the Living Word, Jesus Christ Himself. As Paul said to that worldly church in Corinth, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2 NIV).

The third word is “*the*.” In Greek studies, this term as it is used here signifies the specific Word, the one and only Word. As some might put it, the Word par excellence. It is not just any word, but *the Word*, which stands along and above all else. It is *the Word* which has been “in these last days spoken to us by His Son...” (Heb 1:2). There are many things one can preach. In today’s world, preachers have their favorite topics and denominationally accepted terminology, whether biblical or not-so-biblical. But, if we are going to be counted among the faithful men whom Paul talks about in 2 Timothy 2:2 (“*The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*”), then we need to preach *the Word*. Our message must be rooted in Scripture, whatever we preach about. And keep it centered on Christ. Paul wrote, “We preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23).

Final Assessment

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the

faith...” (2 Tim 4:7)

Serving the Lord is hard work, it is sacrificial work, and often it is a battle. But it is worth it, because it is a “good fight.” Who of us can say about himself what Paul wrote here, “I have finished the course”? Looking back, he recognized that he had fought the right battles, he had not gotten side tracked into small skirmishes, or fights for which winning was inconsequential. It is important for us also to spend our lives charging up the *right* hill, else we end up planting our flag on some mole hill. Paul recognized he couldn’t do everything, that there is a time for everyone to finish his work, and let others carry on. He harbored no regrets, he left it all on the field, as they say in the sports world.

Ultimately, the apostle’s greatest achievement was that he “kept the faith.” This was not an achievement for salvation; of course not! But God couldn’t keep the faith for him; God doesn’t do the believing for us. Believing is something we do. It is the human side of grace. Yes, there is a sense in which God gives faith as a gift (1 Cor 12:9), but Paul writes that, “I have kept the faith.” Not a point of pride or arrogance, and certainly not something to boast about. Simply he had made it to the end without being disqualified in his service of faith (1 Cor 9:27). In the end, we need to finish our service for Him in faith, from the beginning to the end. And we need to end well—in faith.

The Final Recognition of God’s Empowering

“The Lord stood with me and strengthened me ...” (2 Tim 4:17).

Paul knew from where his ability came. He knew the One who strengthened him through grace. The constant theme reverberating through the Scripture, the Lord’s promise to His people, has always been, “I will be with you.” From the first, when he was struck blind, Paul (then called “Saul”) learned of the presence of the Lord. The last

thing he saw with his eyes in his former, unconverted life, was the Lord whom he was persecuting, His very presence. The next thing He saw was the one (Ananias) proclaiming to him his mission and the sacrifice it would require. Paul never looked back! And now he testifies that the Lord has indeed enabled him to carry out that ministry and that sacrifice. He gave him words to say. He enabled him. And Paul never got that truth confused with his own abilities.

So, as we conclude this 15th anniversary issue of Elders’ ShopNotes, I want to echo the charge of the apostle Paul. As you, an elder of God’s people, serve Him in the body of Christ that is under your care, Preach the Word! Fight the good fight. Rely on the Lord’s presence and strength.

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From the Q-File

Interesting Lesson in an Unlikely Place

“**T**hey [the Danites] said to him [Micah, the Levitical priest], ‘Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?’ The priest’s heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image and went among the people” (Judges 18:19-20 ESV). The priest went for the larger audience. Hmmm. Seems innocuous, doesn’t it? But, this was during the time when there was no king in Israel and everyone did that which is right in his own eyes. So this priest, Micah, seems to be an example of how a person in spiritual leadership chooses his area of ministry when he is doing what is right in his own eyes. Not once did he seek the Lord’s guidance (of course, his work as a priest strayed far from the Law’s requirements). Is this not a suitable warning to us who serve in leadership roles, that we should be wary of our ambitions? Blessed are those faithful ones who serve faithfully in small corners of God’s work, and do not give up! I praise God for everyone of them.

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What is Really Important?

by Mary Gianotti

From my kitchen wafted the aroma of seafood lasagna with Alfredo sauce and warm garlic cheese bread. The Caesar salad with real bacon was chilling. My fourteen dinner guests would have a choice of a delicious chocolate torte or rich carrot cake.

Is your mouth watering yet? In general I think about food a lot, but while planning this dinner party it was over the top. Way too much concern went into this small feast. The fun and fellowship with God's people was the real importance.

During the first century in Rome, the consumption of certain foods was a contentious issue. This subject became the eye of a theological storm. The controversy required Paul to write to the believers to refocus their attention on what really mattered.

"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For the one who serves Christ in this way is well-pleasing to God and approved by people" (Rom 14:17,18)

As an elder's wife, spiritual distraction in our fellowship easily gluts my focus. During these times I tend

to put my energies into making life happy or wishing it was. I just want any trouble to go away. But God wants us to please Him by being righteous, peaceful and having a life overflowing with joy. This is a specific instruction to "the one who serves Christ."

The Holy Spirit living His

There is satisfaction in knowing the Lover of my soul will never leave me, ever! In Christ there is always a joy to be found, even in dark times.

Nothing trumps knowing God's pleasure and at the end of the day, realizing that the Holy Spirit's righteousness, peace and joy win out. There is an added blessing to living

The Holy Spirit living His righteousness through me is the only way I can hope to be holy as He is holy.

this way—the verse (Rom 14:18) says we will have people's approval. The original sense of the word "approval" is to prove or demonstrate. Being living examples that prove the Holy Spirit

righteousness through me is the only way I can hope to be holy as He is holy. By entrusting my responses to Him I have power to reject the temptation to be angry, get even or sulk.

The word "peace" refers to actions that do not cause hostility but create harmonious relationships between believers. "So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what edifies one another..." (Rom 14:19). The result of following Christ's way will be inner peace that affects my outward attitude.

Joy over-rides difficult circumstances. The problems don't go away but I can draw from a deep well that never runs dry and always satisfies.

is at work can bring people together for God's glory.



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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