



## Editor's Note

Why would the January issue of a Christian periodical come out in mid-February? The answer is simple: a new editor and a steep learning curve! So after a rocky start and a lot of patience from the support staff, we're trying to get back on time - maybe even a bit early, with the 2nd (March) issue. Thank you for praying for this ministry!

As you read through the 2015 issues, you will probably notice some new names on articles. Colin Anderson (January issue) is a beloved veteran worker from Ontario; David Hayes (March issue) is a young brother and student of the Word here in Connecticut. These symbolize an innovation that we hope will be a blessing to the reader in the days ahead; articles from

older saints with a lifetime of experience; articles from younger saints with a desire to be used of God. Pray for them, and enjoy the fresh perspective that they bring to ESN.

Finally, did you notice the new addition on page 4 called "helpful links?" Look for that each issue as we seek to pass along links to websites that may be useful to you. If you know of a site that's biblically sound and might prove a help to other readers, why not send it in an email note for consideration? We can't publish everything, but we do value input.

Blessings in the Lord,  
Jack Spender

## Leadership Principles Christ Centered Teaching

by David Hayes

Every preacher has his own style. Some are storytellers. Some love biblical languages. Others try their best with the Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. There are those who use their "outside voice," while others whisper so that we may strain to hear the great truth they tell. I like to begin messages with the Lord Jesus. Let me explain.

### The Lord Writes to the Churches

At some point during my studies of the book of Revelation, I realized that each letter addressed to the churches in the various cities of Asia Minor started with a description of Christ. Each particular description of the Lord Jesus leads the church addressed to a proper understanding of Christ and the truth of that description is worked into the encouragement to the church and in some cases it touches the exhortation.

For example, in the letter to the church of Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7), Christ reveals Himself as the One who holds (strengthens and sustains) the churches and walks in their midst. The Lord continues by commending the church for remaining steadfast as they remain in Him their strength. The exhortation to the church for leaving their first love, Christ, is counter balanced with the picture of Jesus ever near in the midst of His people. He never leaves them. In this instance, the encouragement and the exhortation both are grounded in the description of Christ in the

introduction to the letter.

The letter to Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11) begins with the eternal Christ. He is both first and last. He remains the one whom death could not hold. So likewise, Christ's encouragement to a persecuted church is that you may suffer unto death, but there is One who has overcome the grave. All the saints will be raised with Him. The church will not know the second death (Rev 2:10), but forever live with our Lord as He is alive. These are just two examples of the letters to the churches. Christ desired to communicate the truth of His word through the truth of His person. If it was pleasing to Him, should I not consider it in the way that I preach and teach?

The other writers of the New Testament are familiar with this hermeneutic principle.

### The Writings of John and Paul

The epistle of John begins with a declaration of that One which they heard, saw and handled, the Word of Life. It goes on to state that through a declaration of Jesus, fellowship and joy would grow in His hearers. He continues with the blood of Christ as sufficient for our sins, Jesus as advocate, and God as both light and love. These realities of the person of God are the basis for the commands given to confess our sins, walk in the light as He is in the light and to love our brethren as God has so loved us.

Paul's writings often center on a

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## A Time of Persecution

We have been tracing the development of leadership, especially church elders in the book of Acts. The first article was devoted mostly to introductory material and a brief look at chapters 1 - 7 (see Outline; Section I). The apostles who had been instrumental in the beginning of the young church in Jerusalem were necessarily the original leaders. We saw that they were not jealous about this task of leading, but readily delegated responsibilities as the work grew. This is seen in the selection of the first deacons in chapter 6 and formed the basis of our second article.

As is often the case in spiritual things, growth brings blessing and more problems. While the deacons served the people, they found increasing opportunity to develop and exercise their spiritual gifts. One of their number, Stephen, is described as a man "full of faith and power." (Acts 6:8). The Jewish authorities, moved by envy, hatched a plan to get rid of him. His strong testimony and convicting words led to his martyrdom recorded in Acts 7.

At least two significant things arose from this event. The first is that a young man named Saul witnessed Stephen's death and without question was deeply moved by how this man died. The Lord's reference to "the goads" at the time of his conversion (9:5) probably refers to the pricking of conscience which he was trying to resist. He of course became Paul the beloved apostle.

The second significant result was a time of persecution which erupted against the church. As believers fled from Jerusalem, they "went everywhere preaching the word." (8:4). Luke continues the thought in 11:19, "Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as . . . [various countries]." This is an important reference, because it leads into the founding of the first Gentile church, in Antioch of Syria. And it is in this connection that we find the first reference to church elders. [Note: the reference is to the elders in Jerusalem]

## The High Points of Section 2

It seems wise to pause here, and summarize the major events in this second section of the book (chapters 8 - 12) after the death of Stephen. We cannot do justice to the study of elders in the Gentile churches unless we note that there were elders already in the church in Jerusalem who worked in concert with the apostles. And the influence which the apostles had upon them must have been enormous.

As noted in the outline, some important names are found. The author tantalizes us with bits of information that raise more questions than they

*Faithfulness in routine tasks leads to a call to greater work.*

answer! We learn about Philip (one of "the seven"), the apostles Peter and John, an important traveler from North Africa, Saul, and Ananias who ministered to him in his time of need, an extended section about Peter's activities including his visit to Cornelius in Caesarea, the continuing efforts of Barnabas, and a brief mention of the apostle James and the writer of the second Gospel, John Mark. Rather than delve into the full story of these individuals, we must limit our inquiry to an overview of the chapters.

Chapter 8 is devoted to the evangelistic work of Philip. His story reminds us that good servant-leaders are willing to labor among large numbers of people (as at Samaria) or single individuals in need (as the eunuch from Ethiopia). He seemed to humbly accept the follow-up ministry of Peter and John who were sent to Samaria by the church in Jerusalem. His knowledge of the Scriptures and timely help to the man from Ethiopia are heart warming.

By the way, it is interesting to note that according to the record, the church had now increased to many thousands of people before we find the first mention of an "evangelist." This is not to slight this important gift, but only to show how much was accomplished as the believers were witnesses

responding to questions asked (see Acts 1:8; I Peter 3:15 and note the occurrence of the word "witness" in each of the first seven chapters).

## The Conversion of Saul

The conversion of Saul in chapter 9 provides in Ananias another example of one who could lead because he could follow the Lord. Ananias may protest when called by God to go and pray over Saul the persecutor (9:13-14), but when the Lord says "Go," he immediately obeys.

Later in the chapter, Barnabas (first met in chapter 5) helps the suspicious brethren in Jerusalem accept the new convert Saul, now a sincere disciple. Finally, we look in on the activities of Peter as he visits believers in various cities. One thinks of the early invitation from the Lord, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19) which later became, "Do

you love me? . . . Feed my sheep." (John 21:17). It is easy to see in Peter's ongoing work a desire to obey this latter commission. Faithfulness in routine tasks leads to a call to greater work; Peter is sent by the Lord to a Gentile named Cornelius, as recorded in chapter 10.

This account, given in some detail, is worth considering since Peter is now a more seasoned servant who will later refer to himself as "a fellow elder" in his first epistle (I Pet. 5:1). It is instructive to note how God coordinates the timing of the visit. Peter, who is in communion with the Lord about a difficult matter, i.e., the willingness to move outside his "comfort zone," is really being prepared for an unusual mission. The words: "Arise . . . go . . . doubting nothing . . . I have sent them" (10:20), might at times be repeated in the life of every servant of Christ.

Arriving at the home of Cornelius, Peter takes a humble place, "I myself am also a man" (v. 26), relates spiritual lessons he has been learning (28, 34), gives a clear reply when questioned (34 - 43), and takes a firm stand as a strong leader; "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." (48).

After returning to Jerusalem (chapter 11) and being criticized by the

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## **Studies in Acts—part 3** (continued from page 2)

brethren for going into the home of Gentiles, Peter patiently rehearses the sequence of events, concluding with the simple question, "Who was I that I could withstand God?" (11:17). To their credit, these leaders accepted Peter's testimony and responded as Luke records, "they held their peace and glorified God" (vs. 18 KJV) a description which is both satisfying and amusing!

### **God's Sovereignty in Guiding His Servants**

The remainder of chapter 11 is taken up with the beginning of the work in Antioch to which we shall return in the

next article.

Chapter 12 concludes this second section and provides a helpful transition to section 3; the missionary journeys of Paul. We note 3 things briefly. First, in almost a passing comment, King Herod "killed James" the apostle (12:2). From heaven's viewpoint, the servant's work was done; from the world's perspective, an easy way to please one's friends. We need a heavenly perspective.

Second, Peter is next in line to be executed, but God's sovereignty overrules man's designs. God has him released from prison in response to the prayers of the church. It is comforting

to see God's mercy when the church's faith is not strong!

Third, we begin again to trace the history of Paul as he, along with Barnabas, return from Jerusalem to the new church in Antioch. Things are being readied for the next phase in the spread of the gospel, the call to missionary work among the Gentile nations which will occupy us for awhile. By hindsight, the Lord's overruling and coordinating hand seem so unmistakable. Do we have the same assurance regarding the field where we serve?



## **Christ Centered Teaching** (continued from page 1)

Christological theme. The humble Christ of Philippians 2:5-11 is the focal point of the whole book, beautifully tying together the introduction of Paul's humility and expression throughout, that the church be united in that one mind. Timothy is praised for not seeking his own but being like-minded with Paul and Christ (Phil 2:19-24). Later, the description of Epaphroditus who humbled himself almost to the point of death mirrors Christ's humility. Euodia and Syntyche are exhorted to put down their differences and take up the humble mind of the Savior.

Another example in Paul's writings is his letter to the Colossian church in the battle against syncretism (i.e., mixture of false teaching). It is not long into the letter before Christ is revealed as the way by which we know God, and He has the first or highest place over all created things. Jesus is not one of many, there is none like Him. Paul lauds Christ, praises and exalts Him starting with "[in Christ] is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). His readers need not seek another. From that understanding, Paul then begins to battle the mixture of false teaching that was creeping into the church. The person of Christ is the foundation through which Paul expresses truth in this letter.

### **The Gospels**

The gospels are also framed around a particular attribute of Christ. Matthew begins his gospel with Christ's lineage. He is both the son of David and the son of Abraham

(Matthew 1:1). This provides the predominate theme through the book: Jesus is the King of the Jews. John similarly begins his gospel with the eternal One who took on flesh to reveal God to us. Jesus is the Word through which we have heard and believed. Mark begins and ends his gospel portraying a savior who is busy serving and preaching that gospel. Luke is concerned with the historicity and accuracy of his account with no apparent Christ genealogy, but in those introductory chapters of Luke, we get the most beautiful songs of praise to God and a wonderful anticipation of the great work Jesus will do.

Lastly, the Lord Jesus is the subject of the Old Testament scriptures. The Emmaus road walkers heard Jesus expound the Old Testament scriptures, "the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27). The impromptu breakfast with Christ in that same chapter also contained a detailed exposition of the Lord from the Hebrew Scriptures.

### **A Personal Application**

How do we apply this? If I am speaking, for example, on the doctrine of adoption in salvation, I will begin with God the Father's love of the Lord Jesus, and His perfect love and obedience toward the Father. It is something to be part of God's family and be seen in the perfect righteousness of the Son. Nehemiah and his fellow-workers renewing the covenant with God (Neh 9-10) begins for me with a Christ who makes a covenant with a

church that is unbreakable and is conditioned upon His performance and not mine. The renewed Old Testament people of God will fail again after the revival in Nehemiah, but Christ will never fail. The book of James primarily deals with the dedicated walk of the believer in contrast to one who is double minded or in love with the things of the world. While not speaking specifically about Jesus, James presents a picture of God in the beginning of his letter as "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." (James 1:17). This picture of the unchangeable God should color the references for the Christian to be unwavering in devotion to the Lord. I could go on and on...

Is worship limited to the Lord's Supper? It seems that the most doctrinally rich texts are also filled with worship (Romans 8). Are your saints somber? "The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20). What does the Holy Spirit desire to do through the word of God? The Spirit desires to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. (John 16:14) Dear elder, as you start sermon preparations for your next message, how will you begin? Books on hermeneutics may call you to a captivating story to hook your listeners. Others may ask you to begin with some connection to current events or the culture so the saints will perceive you as "relevant." These may be good beginnings, but consider giving Christ the preeminence. From Him all orthodoxy flows.



# Wives' Corner

## Drip Drop

by Maria Forcucci

There is a unique method of war-time torture that may be noteworthy for our purposes today. Have you heard of "Chinese Water Torture"? Captors of POW's would strap the victim horizontally to a table to immobilize him. Then a spigot would be placed just over the victim's forehead where just one drop of water at a time would simply drip every few seconds. The objective was to drive the victim insane and coerce him to reveal any information his captors sought. It is thought that the drip itself did not have the greatest impact but *the anticipation of it* rendered the victim paranoid.

Ladies, Proverbs 27:15 implies that husbands feel this way about a contentious, nagging woman. "A continual dropping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike." How many of our husbands have been rendered helpless under the continual dripping of our requests/demands/opinions? Do we realize the damage done when we rely on our emotions to dictate a certain course of action? Even when we are correct in our thinking, we are wrong to pursue the desired result with nagging. Our husbands will either become emotionally paralyzed or tune us out altogether. Is that our goal when we "remind", "cajole", "encourage" or "insist" upon something that bears on situations we may be observing in the assembly or one of its families?

Jesus told us that He wants to supply our needs. Very often, He throws in our wants as well. In the example of the unjust judge in Luke 18 it is clear that God can take our nagging if we bring it to Him. "Now He was telling them...they ought to pray at all times and not lose heart." (Luke 18:1) Jesus ends His lesson with, "will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night?" (18:7)

God knows we see things differently from our husbands. In fact He gave us to our husbands to be a help in their eldership. But I cannot count the times I have been so emotionally charged about something that I repeated and repeated a matter until my husband might go against his own better judgment. In the end, I usually need to be admonished. I am learning to ask myself some hard questions. "Do I have all pertinent information?" "Why do I feel so strongly about this?" "Do I respect my husband enough to leave decisions with him?" But ultimately, I am asking, "Do I really trust God?"

So what's a woman to do? Here are some suggestions:

1. Take time to think the situation through and pray. Do not make rash judgments.
2. Communicate with your hus-

band. Tell him how you are feeling about the situation and disarm the emotion from taking over your reason.

3. Pray with your husband for God to give you the same heart and mind concerning the situation.

4. Finally, give it over to God if you feel your husband is not doing all he could in the situation.

Like our Lord, we can trust that God is aware of everything and has it under control.

"Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously." 1 Peter 2:23

So why do we do it? Speaking for myself, my nagging is rooted in my selfishness and lack of faith. I want what I want when I want it, and I don't believe God can get it for me, not to mention that many times I neglect to ask if it is what He wants for me. It's really a matter of spiritual maturity. James would say that, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." James 3:2.



### Helpful Links

[www.biblicaleldership.com](http://www.biblicaleldership.com)

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Specific Bible versions used are indicated at the first quotation in each article.

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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"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ..." 1 Peter 5:2a NIV