



Editor's Note

Greetings in the New Year. May it be a year of the Lord's blessing for you and those dear to you! Often at the turning of the year, we look forward in wonder and backward with mixed feelings of regret and thanksgiving. But looking back can be a good thing.

Recently, I have been looking back at some past ESN articles and wondering if they stay buried forever in the "archives." There are probably some diligent students that search them out, and profit by them, but it

raises the question about whether to reprint past articles or readdress the same subjects? In any case, it's a good time to remind our readers that many relevant subjects like the responsibilities of elders (2000); spiritual gifts (2001); small groups (2002); decision making (2003); developing a shepherd heart (2008); and a host of others are available online in the archive section of eldersshopnotes.com. I hope you can take advantage of them.



Problem Solving

Thoughts on Local Church "Alive-ness" (part 1) *by Jack Spender*

In seeking to help local church elders, one of the most requested subjects is how to help failing groups reverse direction, and even begin to thrive. Many once knew the joy of healthy growth, but for one reason or another, have fallen on hard times. Some struggling groups have closed or merged with nearby works; others are on the brink of disbanding.

Now admittedly, this could be a negative subject, and that's never attractive and rarely edifying. But I believe it's possible to tackle difficult subjects in a positive way that offers hope to discouraged leaders and even presents some fresh ideas for growing churches. With that in mind, I'd like to devote several articles to one particular aspect of a healthy church, a critically important part, but one that's hard to describe. In simplest terms, it's about "life" or "alive-ness" as opposed to "deadness;" the rut of weary traditions that may keep things going mechanically, but bring little joy.

In future articles, I'd like to address elders of all churches, large and small, healthy or less so. But first I want to direct a special word to any who are suspicious of "church growth schemes," "prosperity messages," etc. Your concerns are well founded! I have no desire to add to the enormous literature already circulating on those subjects.

But on the other hand, it will do no one any good to simply repeat things that we all know and agree on. There are, after all, healthy, thriving local congregations where the Bible teaching or prayer meeting or Lord's Supper may not be as orthodox as yours, and yet they are thriving! Some of the terms I use may be different from the ones you would prefer. But why not look beyond the terms and try to lay

hold of the underlying message, and see if it might not shed some light?

A Good Place to Start

At the outset, there are two difficult matters that must be faced squarely, so let's begin there. I refer first to the need for honesty about where we are at the moment. God can work with people and groups that have every imaginable problem, as long as they are willing to be honest about it. Without honesty, there is little hope.

Secondly, and this is a painful thought for many; very little will be accomplished if there is an unwillingness to change. It is humbling to admit, but obviously some things we are doing (or failing to do) need to change. I am NOT referring to biblical principles here; but only to local methods, that over the years have been granted the honorary status of "biblical principles" within our circle of influence. Let's take a closer look at these two.

The Need for Honesty

A missionary friend likes to remind us that, "Admitting there's a problem is 51% of the solution." Good advice. Think for a moment about the unsaved family and friends for whom you pray. If one of them suddenly confided to you; "I have come to the conclusion that I have a sin problem," would you not rejoice and feel that the door had begun to open for him or her to receive God's love and forgiveness? But so often the story is otherwise, one of denial, self justification, and so forth. It is a simple unwillingness to be honest about our need. And, as it is with individual hearts, so it can be with collective ones. I think of one assembly that has been shrinking over the years, and as each family drifts away, the

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Biblical Teaching

The Portrait of a Godly Man (Part 2)

by Warren Henderson

This is the second half of a study which began in the previous edition of ESN. Paul is supplying Timothy a portrait of a godly man (1 Tim. 3:1-3) which would assist him and others in identifying those whom the Holy Spirit has called to be elders (Acts 20:28). The character qualities of the elder and even his desire for the shepherding work are to be evident in an ongoing basis, else he is not fit for the work. We have already seen that a godly man is blameless in his interaction with others, and if married, is above reproach in his marriage – he is literally a one-woman-man. We now continue our exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:1-3, the portrait of a godly man (beginning with “temperate”).

Verse 2

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach” (NKJV).

Temperate. Verse 2 contains the “to be’s,” while verse 3 lists the “not to be’s” in character qualities. The first character quality listed is to be “vigilant” which is derived from the Greek word *nephaleos* which means “sober-minded.” The word occurs only two other times in the New Testament and is translated “sober” on both occasions. A godly man is not rash in behavior or prone to debilitating excesses. In another place, Paul reminds us that all believers are to walk circumspectly (Eph. 5:15).

Sober-minded. “Sober-minded” is the next character trait to be found in elders, which is translated from the Greek *sophron*, meaning “safe or sound in mind.” By implication, an elder is to be self-controlled, temperate, and moderate as to an opinion or passion. Church leaders must use discretion in handling problems and be temperate in exercising authority. Paul instructs Titus to teach older and younger men and older and younger women to be *sophron* in Titus 2; it is a character quality that all believers should strive for.

Of good behavior. A church leader must be “of good behavior.” The word *kosmion* means “orderly.” It only occurs one other time in the New Testament and is rendered “modest” (speaking of women wearing modest apparel- 1 Tim. 2:9). The idea seems to convey the thought that elders are to be respectable and sensible in conduct.

Given to hospitality. Church leaders are to be given to hospitality (*filoxenon*) which literally means “fond of guests/strangers.” A godly man shares what he has to refresh and encourage others. Peter exhorts all believers to be generous in the environment of a well-ordered home to encourage and edify others.

Apt to Teach. An elder must be *didaktikon* meaning he must both know and be able to instruct and rightly apply God’s Word to impart blessing to others. Besides encouraging proper growth in others, Paul explains to Titus an additional reason that elders must be skillful in the Word – to detect false doctrine and confront those who teach it (Tit. 1:9). All believers are to use Scripture to counsel and instruct others (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and each husband and father is to teach his wife and children God’s Word (1 Cor. 14:35; Eph. 6:4). An elder does not neglect this responsibility and can skillfully handle the Scriptures.

Verse 3

“Not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous” (NKJV).

Not Given to Wine. *Paroinon* literally means “staying near wine.” It only occurs one other time in the New Testament (Tit. 1:7), and is translated the same way. This is not a prohibition against drinking wine, but does forbid its abuse or the abuse of any substance for that matter. A godly man cannot be preoccupied with or overindulgent in drinking wine. It is good to remember that Paul exhorts all believers, “Be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.” (Eph. 5:18).

No Striker – Not Violent. *Plektes* refers to “a smiter;” one that is literally “ready to give a blow” on an impulse. An elder cannot be quarrelsome, be prone to emotional outbursts, or quick to attack others. A godly man is not quarrelsome – not contentious in nature. J. N. Darby translates it: “not addicted to contention.” An elder is a peacemaker, not a troublemaker.

Patient or Gentle. *Epieikes* is added in the “not to be” section to present a contrast to the pugnacious man. The elder is to be kind, gracious, gentle, forbearing, yielding, amiable and understanding. As expressed to the believers at Corinth, Paul’s meekness in leadership was a powerful exhortation in itself: “Now I Paul myself urge you by

the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:1). As in the other character qualities we have already examined, we can find other Scriptures which also exhort all believers to be patient and gentle: “Let your gentleness be known unto all men” (Phil. 4:5). Not all believers have a gentle disposition, but an elder must be characterized by that quality.

Not Greedy for Money.

Aischrokerdes means “unmanufactured” or literally “not made without hands.” The word is not contained in the critical text (1 Tim. 3:3), but is found in the parallel passage of Titus 1:7. A godly man is satisfied with just income; he does not love or pursue money through foolish means. An elder does not gamble, engage in risky investments, and he avoids get-rich-quick schemes. He is a working man who is content with providing for the necessities of life (1 Tim. 6:6-10). The elder has no desire to use his ministry or those he oversees for profit (1 Pet. 5:2). He knows the value of a good day’s work.

Summary

An elder’s internal calling to shepherding will be evident by the ongoing work that he is engaged in. Godly character cannot be separated from the shepherding work, so those brothers who do not possess the moral and spiritual criteria just discussed should not be recognized as elders. In summary, an elder should be characterized by the following qualities: blameless, temperate, sober-minded, good behavior, hospitable, and patience. He knows, lives, and teaches the Word. An elder should not be characterized by the following: substance abuse, violence, greed, contention, and coveting.



Thoughts on Local Church "Alive-ness" (continued from page 1)

elders console one another with the amazing statement, "Well, they just weren't assembly minded."

But let's remember the brighter side in all this. How many weeks or months must pass, how much gloom and self condemnation does God require before one can be saved? Isn't it true that simple honesty may come in a moment, just as it did for the dying thief on the cross, who one minute was mocking the Lord, and a moment later took the honest place, confessing his need, and was saved! So it can be with discouraged elders and churches. The devil would have it otherwise, but "the goodness of God leads us to repentance." (Rom. 2:4). And repentance involves honesty about our need.

Once we are honest about our present situation, we are ready to confront the second important truth:

This intangible part we have begun to think about is so important to people, that they will tolerate mediocre performance in many other areas just to get it!

Living, Growing Things Change

It isn't that we are about to smash into pieces all that we hold dear, but only to face the fact that anything that stands in the way of following the Lord and caring for the sheep may not be helping us at all; it may be holding back blessing.

Going back to the analogy of salvation, I recently heard a young inquirer ask his Christian friend, "What happens after salvation?" The friend answered in a single word, "Change!" Of course there are many things that could be listed, things in Scripture, and personal issues such as habits or friendships. But the short answer is still true. Where there is life, there will be change.

This need not be intimidating. It helps to keep in mind the saying of an old southern gentleman: "God loves us too much to hurt us, and He's too wise to make any mistakes." This of course is the truth of Romans 8:28.

If we can be honest about our need, and if we can face changes because following the Lord requires it, then we are ready to think about the very interesting subject to which I referred above. Please be patient with the attempt to describe it in a way that will convey the idea without confusing the reader by the use of unfamiliar terms and expressions.

So, What is "Alive-ness" ?

"Alive-ness" of course, is not a word, but an attempt to convey an idea. One of the most elusive qualities of a growing local church is that "climate" or "environment" in which people feel comfortable to learn and grow, be challenged, and even convicted. We'll think more about this in the coming articles, but for the moment, try to form a mental picture of what these words "climate," or "environment" might mean in the spiritual realm.

as college students because that's where we are, and where we want them to be, simply will not work. And sometimes, we who are more mature may learn some things from them in the process!

Conclusion

So while we can all agree on the importance of good Bible teaching, healthy times of collective prayer, responsible leadership by elders, and so on, we must also realize that there is

another dimension, an often overlooked dimension that is vital to church 'alive-ness.' And here is the painful truth. Whether we like it or not, this intangible part we have begun to think about is so important to people that they will tolerate mediocre performance in many other areas just to get it!

In the coming articles, we'll think about the various parts of the life of a church to see if this quality (often called "body life") is present or lacking, and how it may be encouraged. And lest this seem a daunting pursuit, we'll close now with the reminder, "With God, nothing shall be impossible." (Luke 1:37).



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"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33 (KJV) Anyone not completely convinced that this world holds tribulation not only for the non-believer, but also for the steadfast, faithful, sold out servant of the Lord, must be a newcomer to this world, or maybe just a newcomer to the faith.

I would guess that each person reading this article can detail some kind of crisis befallen them in the last year or two. I am surrounded by brothers and sisters who do battle either in their finances, health, marriages, or families. Most of the conflicts and pain are ongoing. I am among those who could share how my past zeal and energy to serve the Lord have been sapped by wounds I could not have prevented or seen coming.

So what do good Christians do when they are attacked by physical suffering, watching the downward spiral of a spouse, sharing the burden of a child going through an unwanted divorce, or _____ (fill in the blank)?

As I was lamenting to the Lord recently over not being able to pray, or have enough faith to cast my cares on Him, or find comfort or strength in His Word, His answer came to me, "Then don't." Surprising, isn't it? I didn't ex-

pect the Lord to be that easy on me and I wasn't sure if I liked it. After all, I was angry at Him, almost looking for satisfaction in His getting angry with me. At least I would know He still pays attention to me.

However, I came to realize that the Lord did not expect me to be happy with my circumstances. He didn't expect me to grin and bear it. He didn't require spiritual pretense. He only asked one thing of me, and, as I thought about it, I was actually already doing it. "And he said to them all, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" Luke 9:23. This encouraged me somehow when I realized no one is exempt from cross carrying and that each of our crosses is tailor-made for us.

Ask yourself some questions. Has your problem/ situation caused you to stop going to church? Has it kept you from serving? Have you given up on those brothers or sisters who are hurting? Have you refused to reach out to unbelievers? Have you said, 'No' to God more times than not? My guess is the answer to at least some of these is no. Basically, you are still following the Lord, as I am, while doing the one thing He has asked: carrying your cross. The question is, are we carrying our cross willingly or begrudgingly? This is the deciding factor in letting go

of a difficult matter.

Carrying crosses is not easy. Everything in us wants to get rid of that cross. But realistically, when you are carrying a cross, you are still, perhaps painfully slowly, moving forward. When you are shaking your fist at the cross, wringing your hands at it, kicking it, trying to find something to destroy it, or trying to pass it off to someone else, you waste a lot of time, become totally exhausted, and go nowhere. When you decide to accept your cross and take control of it rather than letting it control you, you have taken the first step in recovering your spiritual bearings and seeing the end of the trial. This is when you can enjoy what Jesus has promised in John 16:33...His peace. Why be of good cheer? You are not carrying your cross alone. 

THE SMALL PRINT

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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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