



Editor's Note

I'm no chef, but on occasion I like to try something in the kitchen. Recently I searched my wife's cookbook for a recipe for biscuits. What I found was a simple list of ingredients and then some brief, clear steps on how to proceed. The result probably wouldn't win awards, but it worked and met the need.

Now what I did not need was a long description of the value of wheat flour, or the effect of vitamins and minerals on the body, or an explanation of how baking powder makes biscuits rise. Those things are important in

their place, but while they inform the mind they will not make biscuits!

That's a little analogy of what ESN is about. Elders already know the value and importance of building the church God's way. They need some ideas and encouragement on how to work that out where God has placed them. So, many of the articles in ESN, while they do inform the heart and mind, also seek to equip the reader to be practical, and serve up some bread of life for the saints in a way that will benefit them. 

Speaking of Speakers

God's Provision by the Assembly, Part 2 by Ed Anthony

In a previous article we undertook a study of God's purpose for and provision of itinerant servants to the assembly. We noted that God still has gatherings of believers, gifted individuals, and guidance for His local assemblies. We noted that it is through prayer, His Spirit, and planning that God brings together gift and need. The purpose, of course, is to build up the saints with a view to having the saints prepared to help others.

In this article, we thought it might be helpful to look at the corresponding truth of how God uses the assemblies to provide for His itinerant servants. By bringing in this perspective, alongside the one in the previous article, we can help both local assemblies and itinerant servants to be more effective and efficient in their ministering.

Provision of the Assembly

As the Lord then provides His servants, we also need to consider how He provides for His servants. As is evident from the Scripture, the Lord's servant was generally provided for in one of three ways: through the Lord's people locally where he ministered or provided encouragement (1 Cor. 9:14; Gal. 6:6); through the Lord's people from other areas who knew of him and his labors (2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 4:15-16); and through his own work with his hands (Acts 20:34). So it is important, then, that an assem-

bly prayerfully consider how a servant who has been invited will be cared for.

As with the spiritual feeding of the assembly, we should perhaps avoid highly structured formulas. Support of the servant is ordinarily based on prayer, the leading of the Spirit, and planning at the local level. If a brother is preparing a series to help build up the assembly, it may take many weeks of preparation and then some time to travel, minister, and help the saints. What will the assembly do in financial support?

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I have heard of cases where assemblies have given servants about 25 cents an hour. Now servants generally do not have expectations since they depend on the Lord. In addition, the ability of each assembly is different, and out of necessity the servant may have to work with his hands. Therefore, the issue will be the heart rather than a formula. There are some assemblies that share a gift of \$50 or \$100 in response to a given message, and have been doing so for the last 30 years. It may leave one to wonder if there has been any prayer or careful consideration given to the need of the Lord's servants. No disparagement

is intended to such assemblies, but it is good for all to be reminded to be consistently before the Lord in these things.

Speaking personally, what an encourage-

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Last issue, we looked at a couple of spiritual “tools” to help accomplish the Lord’s work, especially the elders’ meeting where needs must be addressed and decisions made.

First, we considered the value of prayer—not just to “open” or “close” a meeting, or even a “season of prayer” for saints and concerns, but to express our dependence upon the true President and Head of the meeting, the Lord Jesus, right in the middle of discussions or decisions.

Then we thought about the presence of the Holy Spirit, not just as indwelling each believer, but as actually guiding the thoughts and participation of our fellow elders—even when viewpoints may differ widely! A man’s position is no guarantee of divine sanction for what he’s saying, of course, but neither are we justified in writing off his participation as simply, “That’s just him.” God, in His sovereignty may choose to guide the group through this particular brother. Keeping this in mind can be a most helpful tool.

Now we want to take a look at another “tool” for teamwork, especially useful in the decision making process. I am referring to the pursuit of “unanimity,” the coming to oneness of mind on a matter.

Some Definitions

Although frequently maligned or even rejected by those who do not really understand it, or who have bought into a system that works by majority vote, or by individuals who have a personal agenda and a strong will, or by those who have “been hurt by abuses in the past,” it is nevertheless a valid biblical principle, and when rightly understood and applied, can be a most useful tool.

Dictionaries define “unanimous” as

“two or more people fully in agreement,” or “having the agreement and consent of all.” Paul relates it to the mind, and states it in a number of ways in Phil. 2:2: “Fill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” (NKJV). From this verse

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we can see that without brotherly love, it’s not going to work!

Before going further, it might be helpful to mention a few negatives. It does not refer to an artificial oneness that goes against honest, heart conviction. It must not be used to cripple the decision-making process by using the lone dissenting voice to prevent needed action. Nor is it a watered down synonym for consensus, e.g., “most of us agree so we’re going ahead.”

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anything we face is what is best, and can be known by us, and should be the chief desire of all, even more than personal, strongly held opinions.

Working Towards Unanimity

In order for unanimity to work well, it is wise to lay a good groundwork, and then use it often, not just in crisis situations. It’s better to have some mutual agreements about oneness when the water is calm. Or to put it another way, it is much more difficult to agree on what oneness is in the middle of a storm, the sensitive situation that has already polarized the church or the eldership.

Begin by stating the obvious. The Lord is sovereign and knows what’s best. We want His will to be done, even more than our own. We have the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16). Elders should be good listeners in order to be good leaders. Every brother has an honest perspective that he sincerely believes is correct, and

he deserves a hearing. Coming to “one accord” is a process, not a pronouncement (Acts 15:25).

Then agree to distinguish between what is a biblical principle and what is personal preference. When a brother says, “I can’t go along with that,” or “I don’t have peace about that,” he must then be willing to share openly his reasons with the group. If his reasoning is based upon Scripture, it’s important to note whether the text given is a doctrinal statement, an implied principle, or simply his own personal preference couched in biblical terminology.

If the objection is an express statement of Scripture, or even an implied biblical principle, it would probably be better to wait and pray for further light, or for the Lord to change hearts. A word of caution is in order. We must realize that the Spirit of God can lay a burden on the heart that there is danger ahead or the timing is not right without immediately supplying the details! Waiting on the Lord and respect for one another is key here.

But if upon examination, the objection seems to be a matter of personal

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preference or custom, then the group may decide—and be unanimous—that the best course of action seems to be to move forward. At this point, it is very important to note that the unanimity that has been achieved is that moving forward is the best course of action for the good of the assembly, and not necessarily that each one holds identical views in the matter.

Nevertheless, even this step needs to be handled carefully. Use wording that appeals to the dissenting brother,

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Elders' Meetings (continued from page 2)

yet shows respect. "Brother, after some prayer and discussion, it appears to most of us that your objection to the proposed course of action is based primarily on preference, and we do not see a potential for harm in the future from this decision. So we are appealing to you to join with us in supporting this step before the assembly, and we will all continue to watch and pray for any course correction the Lord may send."

Situations differ, and therefore the wording will too, but the foregoing illustrates a spirit that is not offensive, as opposed to the terse, "Well, we're going ahead without you anyway...." which can communicate harshness or bitterness equating to, "You lose!"

Making it Practical

Therefore, we can summarize the

process in several points. We all, as well-meaning but fallible men, commit in advance to the following:

1) We will, wherever possible, resist pressing for a decision that we may pray for the Lord to move in hearts or send further light in the matter before us.

2) We will diligently seek for any parts of the matter in which we can all agree, and build on whatever small degree of oneness that already exists.

3) We will give every brother in our leadership a fair hearing, and every brother will humbly commit to the fact that his perspective may be in error due to personal bias or blind spots.

4) We will never forget that we have an adversary who is looking for an opening whereby he may bring division among the Lord's servants.

5) We will agree that pleasing the

Lord and moving forward for the blessing of the saints is the top priority unless truth is compromised or danger lies ahead.

6) Once agreement has been reached on the best course of action, we will communicate clearly to the saints, and move forward without procrastination.

7) We will continue to "watch and pray," believing that "if in anything you be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this to you." (Phil. 3:15)

Some may be skeptical about how realistic all this is, but elders can never do better than admitting there's a problem, and then working as a team to solve it. We can be sure the Lord will honor those who honor Him in this way. 

Speakers (continued from page 1)

ment it is when the Lord uses saints and assemblies we have not seen for quite a while, yet they continue to pray for us and remember the ministry. Just a few weeks ago we received a note from a sister who we saw briefly two to three years ago. She recalled the ministry and the Lord wanted her to send a gift along. Such things bring tears to our eyes.

Another often overlooked area of support is the travel and care of the servant while ministering in outlying areas. There were many who looked out for Paul's welfare and knew his needs (Acts 15:3; 21:5; Rom. 15:23-25; 2 Cor. 1:16). How gracious when we have folks call us to check on any special needs we might have as we visit.

I recently assisted an assembly for a weekend series, and they were quite careful to check with us ahead of time on any special needs and then supplied us with travel funds. Also, they gave us flexibility to stay extra time if we needed to. It was great to see the concern and effort made.

As briefly noted above, keep in mind that servants need time to prepare, so planning ahead is important. Asking a servant to provide a series that would help the saints understand, for example, the book of Daniel with only a few days' notice might be a hardship without some time for prayer, preparation, and review.

Epilogue

Perhaps one of the most overlooked areas in arranging the use of God's ministers is evaluation and follow-up – what was accomplished? Does the Word maintain a priority? Were the saints fed? Were the needs dealt with? Is there a need for further help? These questions involve taking a serious look at how we feed and build up the flock. Are we careful, each and every time the flock is fed, to review the benefits and the need for follow-up?

Notice how Paul was constantly following up with assemblies through letters or by sending another servant (1 Cor. 16:12; Eph. 6:22; Phil. 2:19, 24; Col. 4:8). He wanted to make sure they stayed on track. Did the teaching have its intended effect? Both servant and elders have some responsibility here.

Elders and servants should note what they expect saints to do with what has been conveyed through the Word. How often do the saints have a message brought to them, and out of habit or apathy they may have little or no intention of it being actually used to help along the journey? Those who lead and those who minister must be specific so the saints can take the food and then be prepared to help others.

We have found it helpful for the saints when the teaching that is given to

the local assembly is then reviewed by families at home, as well as at any mid-week meetings or in home groups. This helps in better retaining what has been taught and provides opportunities for clarification and possible follow-up questions for the teacher to answer through writing or in person at another scheduled time.

Well, of course much more could be said but hopefully these thoughts have stirred your heart in a good way, so that there might be a new zeal both in feeding the flock well, and in maintaining the Lord's servants along the way. Keep in mind God's purpose and provision in seeing His flock ministered to.

In this short series, we have considered the importance of God's provision to the assembly of His itinerant servants, and the corresponding responsibility of the assemblies to those same workers. Our hope is that these articles would be an exhortation for both assemblies and itinerant servants to work efficiently, and thus to more effectively build up the saints with a view to making them better prepared to run the race before them. May we take time to rethink our practices and approach so we might be found faithful to the work He has called us to do. 

Wives' Corner

Tamar, the Shrewd Daughter-In-Law *by Maria Forcucci*

Some people glorify God by fiercely overcoming their obstacles, some by accepting them. In this and subsequent articles, we will be looking at 4 women who have been examples of one or the other or both. This article will observe the first of the women in the Lord's genealogy, Tamar, the shrewd daughter-in-law.

Jacob's son, Judah, was not known for integrity. We learn in Genesis 37:27 that Judah spares his brother Joseph's life, not because of a stroke of conscience, but for financial gain. Then, shortly after, he defies Deut. 7:3 and marries a Canaanite woman. They have three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah and so the story of Tamar begins.

As soon as we read in Genesis 38:6 that Judah chose Tamar for Er, we read that he was evil in the sight of the Lord so the Lord took his life. Tamar, the widow, now becomes the wife of Onan, who was to procreate as a legacy to his dead brother. Sparing the details, Onan also displeased the Lord and his life was taken. Now, the responsibility of raising a child to Er's legacy was left to the very young Shelah. Wanting to spare his youngest from an untimely demise, Judah

sends Tamar home to her family until Shelah was old enough to marry her. It is noteworthy that Judah somehow blames Tamar for his sons' early departures instead of looking at his own life of disobedience.

Enter the shrewd Tamar, who as years passed is still forced to wear her widow's garments because Judah seems to have forfeited her union with Shelah, disqualifying her from any inheritance. Getting really tired of wearing black, she dresses and poses as a prostitute to trick and seduce Judah after the death of his wife. If we think of this only as an immoral act, we miss the important precedent Tamar insisted upon which God later put into law as the Levirate marriage. Tamar knew she would be carrying this man's child, but the child would be hers along with the rights that came with it.

Let's face it, Tamar had gumption. In her desire to have an inheritance that was God's provision for her, she also wanted to preserve the family line. In our culture, this would be grounds for serious family counseling. However, Tamar was exclaimed to be "more righteous than I" by Judah.

Not that Judah's opinion means much considering his character, but consider the story of Sarah and Abraham. Sarah took matters of having a son into her own hands by giving Hagar to her husband. This was a lack of faith in God's promise and yet Sarah is still counted among the Hall of Faith heroes in Hebrews 11. Tamar also lacked faith, but it was in the promise of the dubious word of her father-in-law. In fact, her faith in Jehovah is evidenced, as with the other women in the line of our Lord, by God honoring her by including her in His Word.

In light of the culture she lived in, Tamar was a victor instead of a victim of her circumstances. As a woman, she had no rights, no formal education, and no control over who or what family she married into. She simply found a way to claim what was rightfully hers and is recorded in print and eternity as a forebear of the Lord Jesus Christ. What opportunities do we have in our culture to speak and act for the Lord's heritage? How might we attain victory over our circumstances? Perhaps Tamar's tenacity to hold to what is right can motivate us. 

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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.