



## Editor's Note

It's fall where I live, and the leaves are beautiful reds, bright oranges, yellows, and greens. But they're falling from the trees to prepare for the coming winter. As I watched them drifting down, it occurred to me that for some of our readers, spring is coming on and the trees are budding out with new life. Guess it depends on where on earth you live!

The other day we were singing a hymn about the return of the Lord. Several lines described the timing: "It may be at morn...It may

be at midday...It may be at twilight...It may be perchance that the blackness of midnight, will burst into light in the blaze of His glory...." But actually, the coming of the Lord will be all of those, for there are believers in every part of the globe. Guess it depends on where on earth you live!

Paul served the Lord "in season, out of season..." (I Tim. 4:2). Let's do the same as the coming of the Lord draws near. 

## Leadership Principles

### Biblical Eldership: Do you Aspire? *by Robert Gentile*

There is a great need today for godly men to shepherd the church of God. The Lord Jesus had a heart for people and when He saw them being scattered and neglected, He felt compassion for them (Matt. 9:36). Looking ahead to the church He promised to build, He gave instructions through His apostles about who these leaders would be. Always they are called elders or overseers. One word describes their maturity and experience; the other word describes their work. Eldership is not so much an official position as a service. The work often involves much time, late hours, sleepless nights, and weeping eyes.

"Overseership" is a work, then, that is a patient, arduous, oft-misjudged service. Great will be the reward, however. Of such it will be blessedly true: "The hearts of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother." (Phm 7, RV)

We clearly see in God's Word a scriptural balance given as to the responsibilities of elders and then the responsibilities of the saints toward the elders.

First of all, some responsibilities of elders. They are to feed the flock of God, for overseers are shepherds. They go before the sheep rather than driving the sheep from behind. Driving the sheep would be the quality of one who does not have the interest of the sheep at heart. He wants to get them to the end of the journey and receive a hireling's pay for his work. Whatever happens to the sheep, he is not concerned. The Lord's flock needs much love and care. Good pasture for feeding on the Word will lead to rest and contentment among

the sheep. Feed the flock (Psalm 23:2).

Also, overseers are to rule well, not being lords over God's heritage. Overseers must be like Moses, meek and humble-minded. They are exhorted to reach down to foot washing and rise above to uplifting the saints.

Elders are laborers—"And we beseech you brethren, to know them which labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you." 1Thess. 5:12. They are not ornaments, but servants ready to serve. Their service is among and for the saints. The service they perform includes—

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1. Feeding new believers so they mature spiritually
2. Giving biblical instruction to the ignorant
3. Restoring backsliders
4. Visiting the sick and elderly
5. Comforting bereaved saints

They are to warn the unruly and help the saints to work together in love and harmony. Saints are converted from all—and very different—walks of life and are brought together to harmoniously fellowship together.

Next, the saints in divine balance and in cohesive harmony also have corresponding responsibilities. First of all, they are to remember the elders in thanksgiving and prayer. They are exhorted to recognize the elders. The sheep know the shepherd by his voice, and by the service he renders, and they follow him.

Saints are exhorted to obey them. "Obey them that have the rule over you. They watch

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Problem Solving

### Keep Your Balance in the Quest for Fellowship *by Jack Spender*

Local churches come in many different sizes and shapes; not the building, of course, but the makeup of people. The Lord Jesus promised that if only two were to meet in His name, He would be there “in the midst” (Matt. 18:20). In the early chapters of Acts, we read of thousands being saved, and apparently this large company met—at least for a while—as a single group. Yet not many years later, Paul sends greetings to a number of small churches in the city of Rome, most meeting in homes. Apparently, the believers felt no pressure to follow the example of Jerusalem and meet all together with a large number in a single meeting place as “The Local Church in Rome.”

By nature, the church is very adaptable as to size. A wonderful liberty is granted to the Lord’s people to work out logistics as will best honor Him, meet the needs of people, and promote sharing Good News with the world. Fundamental Bible truths and doctrines are largely unaffected by physical constraints.

Those things we sometimes refer to as “core values” of Bible-based churches—churches seeking to follow the New Testament pattern for gathering—are reasonably clear in Scripture. We never read of the Lord giving His people “suggestions,” but we do read of Him giving them “commands.” Thus, it is one responsibility of church elders to distinguish between core values of church polity on one hand, and details of gathering for which no commandment is given on the other. And it is the duty of the saints in the local church to honor, submit to, and pray for their leaders (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24 Gk.).

#### The Blessing of Christian Fellowship

One area of concern that has given rise to a great diversity of approaches over the centuries is how best to meet

the needs of the saints for fellowship. Clearly, fellowship was one of the foundational activities in which the early believers “continued steadfastly” (Acts 2:42). Incidentally, the other three items mentioned in that verse (doctrine, breaking of bread, and prayer) emphasize the vertical relationship Christians have with the Lord, but fellowship highlights the horizontal relationship they have with one another, always reflecting the fellowship each has with the Lord.

This word *fellowship* is not easy to define, but is connected in Scripture with a work of God’s Spirit (Phil. 2:1). The focus seems to be on a living partnership of believers working together toward a goal, thus bringing glory to God. Now there

are many worthy goals for any local church. Some goals can be met in large companies, and others are better cultivated in smaller, more intimate settings. Churches that have grown in numbers often find it necessary to meet the needs of people by the use of sub-groups within the church. Sunday School classes, elders’ meetings, home Bible studies or fellowship

groups are examples.

This is reasonable because it is very difficult to meet needs, hear questions, demonstrate practical love, and bear “people burdens” in a large or “plenary” session of the church. Small groups meeting in homes allow a small number of people to grow in a more intimate knowledge of one another, and then extend practical love and care where needed. Over the years, it has been a joy to hear of the blessings that saints and churches have found by encouraging groups of saints to meet informally for fellowship. This is not new. Paul taught the believers “publicly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20).

Regardless of the goals of such sub-groups within the church, whether meetings in homes for functions of “body

life” or for evangelistic outreach into neighborhoods, one important ingredient in such meetings is relationship building, which is really just another term for fellowship. Relationship building thrives in intimate settings and therefore those settings are very important to the health of a church. Elders should note: There is a profound difference between the question, “How can we provide fellowship for the church?” and “Are we encouraging an environment where fellowship can take

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place?” The first can lead to elder burn-out; the second can open the way for the Holy Spirit to work, creating a healthy setting for discipleship.

#### Listening to the Sheep

Given capable leadership, informal group meetings can provide great blessing for saints and open doors for outreach to people who would never “go to church.” But good leadership is crucial to keep things on track. From time to time, one hears dissatisfaction expressed with small groups and sometimes this can be for legitimate reasons.

It would be wonderful if people always expressed concerns in a courteous manner, perhaps beginning with a question asking why certain things are done a certain way, rather than grumbling. Wise leaders will look past the manner in which complaints are offered to see if there is any truth to the complaint. An old adage says, “Admitting there’s a problem is 51% of the solution.”

*(Continued on next page)*

Over the years, I have noticed that often such complaints about small groups meeting for fellowship can be traced to a lack of balance in the good things crucial to the group. Balance is needed, for example, in the approach to group leadership, the content of the meetings, and an understanding of the purpose for which the group exists. Let's give some thought to this subject, with no desire to control, but rather to provide insights for busy elders, i.e., a perspective to challenge our thinking and perhaps identify and correct problems while they are still small. I'll use the expression "small group," but think in terms of any sub-group within the local church that meets to build relationships while working toward a goal that involves less than the whole local congregation.

**Areas for Balance: Group Leadership**

Just as good leadership is essential in the church, so it is with small groups within the church. Three areas to consider are: 1) choosing the right person, 2) how that person is to function within the group, and 3) how that person receives

ongoing training and support from those to whom he is responsible.

**1) Choosing the right person.**

A study of passages listing the qualities of an elder such as I Tim. 3 will show that the emphasis is on godly character rather than possession of certain spiritual gifts or success in the business world. The same is true for group "under-shepherds." A good leader loves the Lord and the sheep, and is willing to learn how to lead from scripture, from others, and by experience.

Relationships are built by gentleness, the desire to listen more than an urge to speak, and the humility of a teachable spirit. This is where balance comes in. Spiritual giftedness, natural talents, and past experience are all helpful tools, but can never substitute for Christ-like humility and compassion.

When the apostles needed men to care for a need in the church (Acts 6), they looked for men with qualities in three areas: public testimony ("men of honest report"), godliness ("full of the Holy Spirit"), and personal integrity ("wisdom"). If these things are present,

techniques and methods of leadership will fall into place before long.

Finally, it is important that leaders have a good working relationship to authority. Like the centurion in Matt. 8:9, all leaders are "under authority" as well as "in authority." Even elders are accountable and answer to the Chief Shepherd. Too often this truth is accepted in theory, but not worked out in practice. Just as church elders must face the question, "Is it true that 'Once an elder, always an elder,' even if one is no longer doing the work or exhibiting the qualities outlined in I Tim. 3?" group leaders must face the same question. Is there an openness to evaluation and accountability, both to elders above and the sheep below?

Once godly leaders for small groups have been identified, they will need to know how a leader should function within the group, and how he receives ongoing training and support from those to whom he is responsible. In the next issue, we'll think about these questions.



**Eldership** (continued from page 1)

for your souls, as they that must give account" (Heb. 13:7).

The sheep are to esteem and honor them. They are to value and love them and appreciate their services; and lastly, they are to support and trust them.

The local assembly is called out company for God in the midst of a world departed from God. An assembly is not stationary but is either moving forward or going backward. We are always moving. Either there will be a pressing forward in divine ways, or there must be declension from the Word of truth.

All other factors being equal, spiritually speaking, an assembly rises or falls to the level of its elders. Saints emulate their leaders. The higher the spiritual standard, the more the saints rise to meet those standards.

In Hosea 4:9 we read, "like people, like priest." In their greed the priests fed on the sins of the people. The priests were no different from the other people. They made greedy schemes to accumu-

late food. Because they were no different from the people, the priests, who should have been faithful, abused their power

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and glory. And so, the priests, instead of lifting people above spiritually, fell down to the level of the sin of the people.

Today we see some assemblies grow and prosper. In these assemblies, we also see godly, faithful elders sacrificing all for the sake of the flock. They seek to

raise the saints to the highest spiritual level instead of raising everyone to the level of spiritual mediocrity.

The great gathering of the sheep from every land is coming, when the whole flock shall be gathered in the fold above. In view of that time, it behooves us to be busy in the field, counting no toil too much for Christ's beloved sheep.

But one does not need to wait for recognition to serve the Lord or shepherd His people! If there is a loving heart for the Good Shepherd and for the flock of God, one may simply begin to follow the example of the Lord Jesus and study the New Testament pattern of how to feed and care for God's people.

Of course, there must be a desire in the heart to do this work. Paul puts it this way: "Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task" (I Tim 3:1, NIV).

It's a good question: do you aspire?



## Wives' Corner

### The Journey of Faith: Deborah *by Marti Miller*

God gave Deborah a special work to do in a time when “everyone did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). This is not a work God gives to all women. Yet He does give all women a work to do and a place to serve: as wives, mothers, sisters, and even widows. Why did God use her? Maybe because when others wanted to serve themselves, Deborah wanted to serve God.

Deborah served as a prophetess. She sat under the palm tree of Deborah and the people would come to her for judgment (Judges 4:4,5). That word “prophetess,” as *Strong's* notes, is Hebrew, “išâ—woman.” The first use of this word is in Gen. 2:22 when God formed “a woman” from Adam’s rib. Deborah was simply a vessel with a willing heart and voice that God chose to use in desperate times.

We know very little of Deborah. As God’s available vessel, she also made herself readily available to the people by sitting in a visible place. Do others know you are readily available? Are you approachable?

When she made judgments, she made them as “a mother in Israel.” Judges 5:7 says, “Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel.” This implies one who is looked up to, a woman of wisdom who is trustworthy. Deborah may

have been elderly, having experienced much of life and learned well the ways of God. Regardless, she recognized God’s call for her and rose to the occasion.

She is both willing and obedient in this call to put herself in a vulnerable place. Trusting God, she didn’t waver to go with Barak into battle, possibly even

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putting herself in harm’s way, when he seemed to waffle in his commitment to be used of God (Judges 4:8,9). The safest place to be is to be in the will of God.

We can call Deborah a listener. God used her to listen and speak to the children of Israel and she listened to God’s promptings and spoke His commands to Barak, “Go and deploy troops...” (Judges 4:6) as well as, “Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?” (Judges 4:14). With God’s au-

thority she is able to command and give courage to one who is weak. Proclaiming God’s word, she also points out that the Lord goes before the one He commands. It was not her presence with Barak that brought victory but the presence of her mighty, working God!

Deborah sings of God’s victory in the next chapter. This passage begins with the mention of willing leaders and I believe it is a key verse in this account. “When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, Bless the Lord!” And again, “My heart is with the rulers of Israel who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the Lord!” (Judges 5:2,9). Indeed, the Lord is happy when we offer ourselves to do His work.

Finally, she sings of love for the people and their leaders as well as the value of hearts willing to follow the One who goes before them. What an encourager Deborah is! Her song closes with encouragement for you and me. “Thus let all Your enemies perish, O Lord! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength. So the land had rest for forty years.” (Judges 5:31). Rest follows the heart that willingly follows God. Be encouraged today to be like the sun, shining in His strength! 

#### THE SMALL PRINT

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**Contact Info.** Elders’ ShopNotes, c/o 112 Doolittle Dr. Bethany, CT 06524, USA  
E-mail: [alan7s@yahoo.com](mailto:alan7s@yahoo.com)  
Phone: 203-393-0078.

Publisher/Editor: Jack Spender  
Editorial assistance: Ruth Rodger  
Layout: Ryan Farrington

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