




Editor's Note

ANo space is needed to prove that this is a discouraging world. The news media has that base covered. Encouragement is needed, especially for all who serve the Lord in this discouraging world. Few things are more encouraging than clear, specific answers to prayer. Some time ago, this paper was facing a dearth of writers for the "Wives Corner" of each issue, so we brought that need before the Lord. Now I'd like to praise Him for the clear and specific answers sent.

Looking back over past issues, sister

Maria Forcucci wrote several articles, and readers enjoyed those. Then Marti Miller did an encouraging series on the journey of faith, highlighting godly women of the Old Testament. Recently we asked a young sister named Rachel Kichar to submit an article, and it's in this issue. Speaking of encouraging words... brothers, you might want to take a look too. I did, and her thoughts are still encouraging my soul weeks later! In this issue you'll also enjoy short essays by former ESN editor Chuck Gianotti and Warren Henderson. 

Biblical Foundations

So What? by Chuck Gianotti

The apostle Paul begins his poignant letter to Timothy as "an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope..." (1 Tim. 1:1 NASB). That is a theologically packed statement! Here we have spiritual gifting and authority, "an apostle"; accountability, "according to"; obedience, "the commandment"; soteriology, "God our Savior"; incarnation, "Christ Jesus" the Messiah; prophecy and eschatology, "our hope." Some may pick away at this analysis, but you get the picture. Paul was strong on doctrine. He warned the elders at Ephesus that wolves (i.e. false teachers) would come from the outside as well as rise up on the inside of the church leading believers astray (Acts 20:29-30). One of the rock-bottom qualifications for elders is "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he [the elder] will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9).

When I was young in the faith, my understanding of Christology was formed by the many debates I had with "Jehovah's Witnesses" who thought me a willing target for their false teaching. It continually drove me back to the Word, and now that is one of the doctrines

I am the most sure about. Jesus came as God in the flesh (Col. 1:19, 2:9) and because he is God incarnate, I am complete in Him and He is the head over all things (Col. 2:10). What a wonderful truth, a solid foundation for life and hope. I am secure in Him, and therefore no one and nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39).

I have now been a believer in Jesus Christ for almost 50 years, having been saved just after college. You would think I would have all my doctrines down pat. But then I begin to wonder when I read what the apostle John wrote in his old age:

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning... I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. (1 John 2:13-14).

I'm not a spiritual child; that is long past. Nor am I a young man (against my ardent arguments to the contrary). So, I pass over those parts of this passage. Maybe to us old guys, the Holy Spirit has to repeat Himself, for you may have noticed the almost identical wording of the two statements. Scholars, I am sure, would dice this up and find some subtle differences in verb tenses, placement in the sentence, and so on. But I ask, is this a tip of the hat to our

memory challenges as older believers, or is it a literary method of repetition for emphasis? I suspect the latter, but my younger self would have wanted more certainty than that!

I think I am beginning to understand more profoundly, though, that a life lived for Christ should have the goal

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of knowing God. To be sure, many of us have known this truth at some level, having read classic books like *Knowing God* and *Knowing Christ*. The apostle John may be setting the standard high for all believers by challenging us to never stop seeking God, so we can get to the end of our lives and say, "I do know him!

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I really do. I have learned what God is like.” Not just a theology but a real *knowing* Him.

I understand why He wants us to know right doctrine, to fight the good fight, to be disciplined in our spiritual walk, to do battle in the spiritual trenches. It is not so that we can outsmart the false teachers, gain a greater following for our own preaching, or stand in the self-righteousness of our spiritual smarts. No, it is not even the ability to find a relatively minor disagreement with someone’s preaching in the midst of an otherwise sound teaching, and then elevate that to the level of important doctrine. No, none of these!

Paul in his later years, as someone who had the wisdom from long serving the Lord, writes to Timothy:

As I urged you...remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than

furthering the administration of God which is by faith. (1 Tim. 1:3-4)

The Ephesian church where Timothy lived when Paul wrote this letter was the same one Paul warned about false teachers (Acts 20:29-30). He reminds Timothy of the same issue. Paul is not going light on doctrine, by any means, but note the end game that he has in mind.


But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (1 Tim. 1:5)

On one level the apostle is motivated by the prospect that his challenge to Timothy would engender a loving attitude on Timothy’s part toward the believers in Ephesus. But on another level, the goal of Timothy’s following Paul’s instruction is that the believers themselves would rise to a greater understanding and experience of genuine love for one another, the value of a conscience free of guilt and a faith that is greater than their doubt. The goal is not right doctrine, *per se*. Circling back to 1 John 2, we could say, that to

know God, you fathers, is to understand our heavenly Father’s heart, and that is to know and be like Christ.

This, then, is the answer to possibly one of the best theological questions we can ask of any doctrinal teaching, “So what?” What good is it to have our

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doctrine in order and correct? What difference does it make in our lives? Some see doctrine as an end in itself, like a final exam to prove you are faithful to the teachings of your Christian peer group. The apostle Paul says otherwise: the goal is love, freedom from guilt, and growing faith that is genuine. That, I submit, is the answer to the question, “So What?” 

Problem Solving

Remembering the Lord Despite COVID-19 by Warren Henderson

On the eve of His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples to keep the Lord’s Supper often and as He had prescribed it. When they did gather to break bread, they were to maintain the feast’s intended purpose of remembering Him. Paul conveys the Lord’s commands to the church at Corinth: “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:24-25).

Believers are to keep the Lord’s Supper often, but no specific regularity was stated. The first Lord’s Supper was not held in a local church building, in fact, the Church did not exist at that time. In the early days of the Church Age, believers obeyed the Lord’s command by continuing steadfastly in the breaking of the bread (Acts 2:42), and they did so often from house to house (v. 46). Clearly,

believers were meeting informally and often to remember the Lord (not just on Sundays or as a local assembly).

Years later, the practice of the local church gathering together on Sundays to break bread became the standard pattern of the Church. For example, Paul uses the language “when you gather together” five times in 1 Corinthians 11 to speak of the local church keeping the Lord’s Supper while together in one place. On another occasion, Paul waited a week in Troas to break bread with the saints there on Sunday (Acts 20:7). However, because Paul preached long, they actually did not break bread until the wee hours on Monday morning and that was completely acceptable. To summarize then, *the commands* for the Lord Supper are to do it often and to preserve its protocol and purpose. *The developed pattern* of the Church was that saints gathered together in local assemblies on Sunday’s to break bread together. The latter point is a scriptural observation, which means there is no prohibi-

tion in Scripture preventing saints from remembering the Lord on other days of the week or in smaller groups.

Through the years we have often remembered the Lord through the breaking of bread with those who were sick in the privacy of their homes and on week days. There have been times while traveling that our family has remembered the Lord at a picnic table in a roadside park because that was the best opportunity available for us to do so. The Lord wants us to remember Him by breaking bread, and we should seek to be with others if physically possible to do so, unless there are good spiritual reasons for not doing so, such as someone professing Christ but being unsound in doctrine or in life (i.e., a person who is continues in unconfessed sin, perhaps under church discipline). But these are spiritual factors not limited by a physical location. The Lord’s fellowship is spiritual and all believers should remain seated with Him at His Table

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in glory every moment of every day (1 Cor. 10:16-22). The Lord's Table reaches beyond just the physical gatherings of saints. How else can we gather to the Lord seated on the throne of God, unless He spiritually is with us (Matt. 18:20)?

On this point, notice, Paul's language towards believers in other locations, "For I indeed, as *absent in body but present in spirit*, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has done this deed" (1 Cor. 5:3-4). "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am *absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit*, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Col 2:4-5). Though Paul was separated by distance,

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he was still with these saints in spirit. This means that if he had had the opportunity to video conference with those he was connected with in spirit (to see

and hear the saints in real time) I think he would have gladly done so.

So when we are in physical isolation because of the COVID-19 crisis, it seems pertinent for us to obey the Lord's command of remembering Him the best way that we can by gathering in spirit with others who can. It is realized that during this interim we cannot imitate the *practice* of the Church witnessed in Scripture. While following the scriptural pattern of gathering is safe for guiding our behavior, it should never negate the part that is commanded. Let us follow the Lord's command and remember Him the best possible way we can! 

Practical Ministry

When Elders Face No-Win Situations by Jack Spender

On occasion, church elders can feel like they've been placed in a no-win situation. Recent global events provide a good example. How should a NT assembly relate to pandemics and protests? Some say we must obey government instructions while others oppose letting the government control the church. Some think that failing to take a public stand on social issues is to condone injustice, while others believe the church should only pray for peace and share the gospel. So what do you do when good saints hold (and promote) widely different views, expecting the elders to lead the church in their preferred direction?

Some thoughts to consider

First of all, let's remember that in Christ, there aren't any no-win situations! The Lord is in control and nothing escapes his notice. He promised to build His church and that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). We're not talking about a heavenly perspective but what some people think. What a load that takes off our minds! So let's be sure it gets included in our Bible teaching ministry.

Second, it's OK to admit that sometimes we just don't have a good choice and a bad choice. In a fallen world we sometimes have options none of which

we favor. God knows that, and He can still lead us in the way we should go if we seek Him. Another load lifted!

Third, the Lord Jesus and the apostles lived during the Roman Empire, and history is brimming with records of social injustices, many of which were horrendous compared to what we face today. On many of these, neither the Lord nor the apostles took a "position." When such subjects did come up, the perspective was God's kingdom and the disciples' witness rather than the improvement of society. In fact, Paul did not live in fear of being criticized for giving instructions to believing slaves about their conduct, rather than crusading against slavery.

The Believer-Priest

One other point that we don't hear much spoken about these days, and which ought to be part of the equipping of the saints (Eph. 4:12) in assembly teaching and training, is the practical outworking of the priesthood of all believers. What are the implications?

While I have no desire to speak criti-

cally of, or demean Christian denominations, (we thank the Lord for every child of God regardless of his religious associations, and every Bible-believing church regardless of its affiliations), the plain fact is denominations usually have policies beyond Scripture that govern church conduct. The assembly has no such earthly governing bodies. So why is that significant?

When people are added to the assembly, by coming to Christ or by change of location, many bring along with them a denominational mindset. They're not trying to cause problems; they simply have not known any other way. So the immediate response when political or social issues surface, is to

expect the church leaders to "take a position," and solve the problem, or at least lead the church in that direction. The idea that I, as a Christian believer can go to the Lord and the Scriptures, discern what my responsibility ought to be, and then quietly serve as the Lord directs me is foreign to their thinking.

Let me illustrate from past experi-


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ence. When young families come into the assembly from other connections, they typically want to know about our school or camp or neighborhood Bible study or countless other things. If we have these, all is well, but if we don't the next question is "Why don't you?"

When the suggestion is made that "Perhaps the Lord has given you that burden and brought you here to meet the need and possibly teach us some lessons," they often have a blank look. I imagine what they're thinking. "We're

lay-people...we can't just do that." This is where the assembly should shine! People need to be taught that as believer-priests they are free to follow the Lord in their homes and families, and even in civic or public involvement. If the Lord blesses what they're doing others may want to get involved.

Of course it's very important to remind them that personal activities are not automatically endorsed or supported by the church, but the Lord can make changes if appropriate, and the elders will

lead in that. But that's not the starting point. This gives tremendous freedom to believers to see a need, follow what they believe to be the Lord's leading, and take action, leaving the scope of their ministry to Him. They must be taught that elders are not the head of the church. They follow Christ the Head from among the flock, as He calls and leads believer-priests in their personal ministries and functions. 

Wives' Corner

Five Loaves by Rachel Kichar

“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish...”
—John 6:9

Don't you wonder who she was, the woman who packed the little boy's lunch? Whose hands made the barley loaves that the Creator blessed and multiplied? When she kneaded the warm dough, what thoughts filled her heart? Was she longing to go with her son, to follow the great teacher and hear the wonderful things He said? Did she feel left out, and wish she was free to leave the hot kitchen and go be a part of the exciting work that God was doing? Maybe she watched the stream of burdened, sad faces that passed her window, heard snatches of heartbreaking news


about sickness and unrest and strife, and wished with all her heart that she was free to help, somehow. Then again, maybe she felt the same way I feel about packing lunches—hurrying to get through a necessary chore at the busiest time of the day, thinking no further than her mental to-do list.

But she made the bread and packed the lunch. And when the long-awaited Christ wanted to give bread to the hungry, He did not cause manna to rain from heaven. He did not speak a meal into existence. He did not take the devil's suggestion and

turn stones into bread. No, He reached for the loaves that her hands had kneaded and broke them to feed the multitude. He loathed to send the crowd away hungry.

He wanted to demonstrate to His disciples—and to us—that His resources are limitless. He must have had a special smile for the hungry boy who gave away his lunch. But I wonder

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if one of His many purposes that day was simply to show a woman—that woman? me? you?—that He could change eternity with the mundane labor of her hands. 

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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.