



Editor's Note

Recently, I was looking through the archives on our ESN website: "eldersshopnotes.com." (By the way, if you've never done that, all past issues are available) In looking at our first issue, I thought you might enjoy reading the Editor's Note by Chuck Gianotti explaining the vision for the ministry! I've copied it here, and pray that we're still being true to it, over 20 years later.

"Welcome to the first edition of Elders' ShopNotes, a publication for the busy elder who is secularly employed. If you are one of these brothers, we praise God because we know you are trying to faithfully lead God's people. You also shoulder responsibility as a family man and conscientious worker or professional in the secular field. That's a lot to handle!

"Why a new publication when bookstores, internet and conferences overflow with resources on leadership? Even in one book the amount of material can be overwhelming. That's where we come in. "ShopNotes" is a woodworking term (appropriate for followers of "The Carpenter") referring to handy point-

ers for tool sharpening, jig making, carpentry techniques; things that help a woodworker do his job well. In the same way, we would like to provide you with "bite-size" helps in sharpening your understanding as well as practice of biblical eldership. You will find each article crisp and concise so that you can read each in a few minutes. And we will publish it bi-monthly to give you time to reflect, digest and even implement some of the ideas at a reasonable pace.

"Some columns will provide scriptural teaching to help you understand your functioning as an elder. Others will focus on your personal life. Still others will contain practical pointers. There is even something for your wives in Wives' Corner. Most of the columns will continue from issue to issue following the same general themes. If you find this first issue of value, please write or email to request a free subscription and let others know about it also. May the Lord cause your ministry to result in praise and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ."



Practical Ministry

"What Now?" by Dr. Nathan Dow

This is a question many leaders among God's people are bound to be asking themselves as the new year brings new challenges. "What will 2021 bring?" "What will leading look like in 2021?" **"What now?"**

Perhaps, however, instead of only looking forward, we ought also to quickly look back for a helpful hint from God's Word. Here is one from the book of 2 Chronicles.

"Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem" (2 Chr. 19:1). The context of this statement can be found in chapter 18.

2 Chronicles chapter 18 chronicles the first of three recurrent failures in the life of godly King Jehoshaphat, as he became unequally yoked in a family and military alliance with ungodly King Ahab. Only by the miraculous help of the Lord, Who "diverted (Syrian chariots) from him" (2 Chr. 18:31), did Jehoshaphat narrowly escape death.

2 Chronicles 19 then chronicles the months that followed this devastating defeat. How is a godly leader to respond after such a biting blow? That's less obvious, isn't it?

"What now?" Jehoshaphat must've wondered as he made his way home. Thankfully he need not wonder long, for we read that "Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him" (2 Chr. 19:2).

"Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you. Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God." (2 Chr. 19:2-3).

Unlike his father, Asa, who lashed out in self-justifying anger against the prophet Jehu's father, Hanani, Jehoshaphat humbly accepted this chastening rebuke of the Lord; He clearly agreed with God, acknowledged his sinful shortcomings and began to bear "the fruits of repentance" (see 2 Cor. 7:11).

"What now?"

"So Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem" (2 Chr. 19:4a).

Jehoshaphat restricted his adventures abroad. He wholeheartedly gave himself to

(Continued on page 3)

The subject of the church is fascinating to many who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and why not? As the world promotes its organizations, which come and go, the Lord continues to build His church, which endures throughout the ages not as an organization, but a living organism with a living Head, a body having members, and empowered by the Spirit of life!

Since living things thrive on healthy relationships, the individuals of this great body tend to congregate together locally wherever they can for fellowship. These congregations or assemblies can be found all over the world. Culturally, they manifest a great diversity, but being indwelt by the same Spirit of life, and following the same living Word, they share some important traits or marks in common. These stem from the nature of the Lord Himself, and enable individual congregations to continue to grow and reproduce.

If believers depart from the basic design, their gatherings tend to wither and become unfruitful, or turn into large “organizations,” and in time are replaced by new congregations seeking the simplicity of what is often called “body life.” This makes a clear understanding of the divine blueprint very important. True believers never lose their salvation, but they can suffer the loss of heartwarming fellowship if their local gathering falls apart. For this reason, companies of Christians study the revealed pattern because they realize the consequences of misapplication of it. Being careless about how one builds on the original foundation (1 Cor. 3:10) will bring problems. No wonder Paul warns the church to “take heed” or “pay attention.” Sound advice!

As one old brother used to say, “If God admonished Moses to be sure the tabernacle being built in the wilderness was a faithful replica of the heavenly example (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:5), which tabernacle (or tent) has long ago perished, how much greater care ought to be given the divinely revealed pattern of companies who make up the bride of His Son?”

Sadly, some have no interest in the subject, and others see nothing wrong with altering the blueprint to fit their preferences. But there are always some

who have an eye toward the coming day when “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Cor. 3:13). Actually, many reasons can spark a fresh interest in God’s design. New assemblies need a biblical basis to begin. Groups that have lost their first love can repent and rebuild.

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Those who are under spiritual attack will find little help from manmade traditions; they need the Scriptures. And some local churches are trying to transition to a more biblical approach to church order and government.

Therefore, these truths about the NT church need to be discovered, applied, and then upheld or defended everywhere. A brief series of articles seems appropriate, with the title “Upholding New Testament Church Truth.” The intent is not to be exhaustive or to criticize other groups but to examine the high points, not simply as theory, but practically, with emphasis on how to defend and safeguard what is so often misunderstood and even being undermined today.

Upholding Church Truth

To uphold truths relating to the divine pattern for the church, we must:

- Know what they are
- Know what they mean
- Know the Scriptures on which they are founded
- Understand appropriate applications for believers gathering together
- Commit to disciplining young believers to ensure continuity

The subject need not be complicated. We have a gracious God, and He

is pleased with any honest effort based on our often limited understanding of His Word.

Before tackling the key areas of our subject, let’s remind ourselves of one profound truth to put the whole matter into proper perspective, and to warm our hearts. The ultimate reason for spending time and giving diligent attention to the subject has been revealed in Scripture: “Christ loved the church and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25), and the spiritual man will “acknowledge that the things that I [Paul] write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37).

This subject then, is dear to the One Who gave His life for me, for you! And make no mistake, it’s not just individual believers He loves. It’s not just the one body worldwide He loves, but it’s the local companies gathering in His Name! This is very clear from Revelation 2 and 3 (see especially 3:19), where we see Him walking among the lampstands (individual churches), inspecting the lights, sending each a compliment or counsel—and if we may say it reverently, feeling sad when the love of a local fellowship grows cold through worldliness.

If our starting point is sound, that this subject is precious to our Lord, it will protect us from the dangers and errors that plague many groups, where things are arranged according to “what meets our needs.” Let us check our heart motives carefully so that this wonderful subject may be studied with humility and the desire above all else to please Him, and the conviction that His Word and ways cannot be improved upon! In addition, truth must always be defended with a Christ-like spirit.

An Outline of NT Church Truth

What then are the most important truths relating to the order or pattern for the establishment and gathering of a local church as presented in the New Testament? A simple outline suggests there are four subjects to consider:

- 1) Leadership in the assembly:
Who has the Lord’s authority to oversee the work?
- 2) The priesthood of believers:

(Continued on next page)

What standing and functions are given to the people?

3) The nature of the assembly:

How is it constituted, and how does it relate to other groups of believers and to the world?

4) The Headship of Christ:

How does the church maintain a pleasing relationship to the Lord?

These headings are not exclusive; there will be some overlap. Also, the above order has been chosen for reasons that are more practical than theological. More will be said about that as we go forward.

Leadership in the Assembly


Our first NT principle to consider is leadership. There's an old saying, "As leadership goes, so goes the church." Not in the Bible are those words, but it is a principle seen in the kings of Israel and in the NT as well. People want to be led. Good leadership in the church is crucial.

Following our outline above, we want to know the words used to describe church leaders, what those words mean, how a local church works out this biblical pattern, and especially how the next generation is trained to appreciate and embrace the NT church form of government.

Throughout the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings led God's people, but the older, respected men or elders sat in the gate of the city and decided day-to-day issues. Thus it's no surprise that when the New Testament church began, leadership responsibility involved the older men of each congregation. In fact, the description *older* (or *elder*) became a leadership position in the church, so we read of "the elders" (1 Pet. 5:1), who are also called *overseers* or managers. One word describes their age and experience comparatively; the other describes their work.

Many passages throughout the Acts and Epistles help us understand how el-

ders are raised up, how the saints can recognize them, and what they do. Simply stated, they work as a team that through prayer and study of the Scriptures discerns the Lord's will in the spiritual feeding of the congregation, and leading in matters that affect the church.

Since we want to highlight the practical side, in the next article, we'll focus on how a local church can enjoy the liberty which the Spirit of God always brings, and yet remain faithful to the divine blueprint laid down in the Word. Finally we'll think about the very important matter of continuity, or what is often called "passing the baton" to the next generation. Until then, let's remember that true orthodoxy or faithfulness to the Scripture is not simply an outward form, but also a living spirit of Christ-like sacrifice. NT truths are best upheld by those who love them and embrace them as precious. This is a noble goal among all who lead and teach in the church. 

"What Now?" (continued from page 1)

the "local" work. Now was not a time for personal travel, nor national campaigns into new territory. He was content to stay home and attend to those under his God-given authority.

"And he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim..." (2 Chr. 19:4b). Jehoshaphat needed to start "again" at ground level. Similar to his early years, he personally went through every territory, to every town to examine every aspect for himself (2 Chr. 17:1-6). This was not a work to delegate; he needed to be "among the people" himself.

"...And brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers" (2 Chr. 19:4c). Since his original "teaching" campaign years earlier (2 Chr. 17:7-9), some of God's people had backslidden passively into complacency and/or

actively into idolatry. Jehoshaphat, having been away for some time among idolaters himself, felt doubly obliged to do all that he could to restore the people

to their God. One can only imagine the power of his humbling testimony of God's goodness amidst his own faithless foolishness. Yes—"the wrath of the Lord" was rightly "upon" him (2 Chr. 19:2). Yet, one also wonders how often Jehoshaphat quoted the "nevertheless" of 2 Chronicles 19:3 in pleading with the people to repent and return to their God!

"But with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4).

Let's be fully forthright. 2020 has been a hard year to shepherd God's people. Physical distancing, face masks and gathering restrictions have thrown many godly leaders for a loop. Not all have responded well.

Equally true, 2020 has been a hard year for the people of God. Many have suffered. Various saints have varying views on all things COVID-19. Coupled with political changes and economic unrest (among other things), this has sadly led to some spiritual dearth and discouragement. So in asking again:

"What now?" Should restrictions


loosen in days ahead, there will be a subtle temptation to travel abroad again, yet, perhaps this ought to be a season to dwell at home. The months ahead are likely to be a time for those tasked with shepherding to once "again (be) among the people" of God.

Shortcomings in 2020 will need to be acknowledged; humility will need to be evident. Some sheep will need to be "brought...back to the Lord God." Others will need to be encouraged to press on, acting "in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and with a loyal heart" (2 Chr. 19:9).

This may feel like starting all over "again." So be it. This is not a work to be taken lightly, nor to be delegated just yet. That will follow (2 Chr. 19:5-7). This is a time to "be diligent to know the state of your flock and attend to your herds" (Prov. 27:23). Prepare your hearts, brethren!

"What now?"

"Behave courageously, and the Lord will be with the good" (2 Chr. 19:11).

Even so, come Lord (Good, Great and Chief Shepherd!) Jesus! 

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Wives' Corner

Discretion, Continued by Marti Miller

“When wisdom enters your heart,
and knowledge is pleasant to your
soul, discretion will preserve you;
understanding will keep you”
—Prov. 11:22

Viewing young women growing up in our world today, I am amazed that the rules of conduct seem to have morphed into some otherworldly habits! May I just take a moment to look at some things that Scripture has to say about what is proper for women professing godliness? The instruction God gives in His word is really more about the attitude of heart that carries us and the display of character seen in our moderation and manners.

“Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness” (1 Tim. 2:9-10, NASB).

Deportment is a word not commonly used these days. It speaks to how one carries herself: posture, walk, conversation, conduct, etc. Yet it also includes her attitude, style, and manners. The Greek word for adorn means, “to put in proper order, decorate, to trim a wick.” Wait, what?

Think of the intentional trimming of the candle wick that it might burn

upright, without smoke, and without flickering. We want the fragrance of the candle, the beauty of the flame, and the benefit of its illumination, not the black, sooty residue. Likewise, our adornment is important if what others see is to be beautiful, clean, and fragrant. More specifically, could others see me and sense that I am a woman of God? It’s not that modest clothing makes a woman godly, but having a mindfulness about her clothing keeps her from mistakenly giving the wrong impression about her character.

In thinking about ways to encourage our young women to honor the Lord in these areas I am reminded of the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31. Beginning in verse 10, she is said to be virtuous or excellent, that is, having a strong moral character. It is a military word. She had the moral strength of a strong army. She wasn’t wishy-washy about what she did, how she looked or how she held herself. She

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In the passage, the word “wife” could be translated “woman.” It is highly

unlikely that she displayed any of these fine things listed by being married. Rather, she had a strong moral character and therefore, made an excellent wife.

She is trustworthy, doing good and not evil all her days (v.12). She works willingly (13), consistently, and considerately (15). She works hard (17-20) and she is mindful of those in need, doing what she can to help them. She is well-clothed, properly fit for the woman who represents her husband (or father) who sits in the gate and has a place of honor and responsibility.

Pause with me. Being properly fit is not about the money, the fashion or name brand. Does my appearance give honor to the One I love? Is it respectful of His character and holiness? Is it mindful of His request to be modest? Is it proper in its fit or is it fit for the place it’s worn? This follows the thought of discretion I mentioned last month.

Therefore, I ask, do you want to be an excellent woman? Then seek to have a strong moral character; give careful attention to how you act, speak and appear by giving careful attention to heeding the Word and applying its truths to your heart.

Proverbs 31:30: “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing; but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.”



THE SMALL PRINT

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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.