



## Editor's Note

“Welcome to our new subscribers. The mission of ESN is to provide encouragement and practical teaching for elders who seek to shepherd God's flock in the local church. Many elders work responsible full-time secular jobs, have families and are involved in various ministries. In addition, some have been thrust into eldership with little or no training. The busy elder has precious little time for self-study and further training. Much of the practical teaching for pastoral leadership is contained in resources that are directed toward 'The Pastor' of a traditional church, so is limited in its applicability to working elders who are not seminary trained and have limits on their time.

“ESN exists to encourage you by providing: 1) 'Bite size' teaching readily digestible for the working elder whose

time is at a premium; 2) Helpful how-to's that are practical for shepherding the congregation; 3) Basic biblical leadership principles; 4) Teaching for how elders' wives can be a support to their husbands. If you would like us to address a specific issue, please let us know. The Lord bless you as you continue to serve Him, the 'Great Shepherd.'” [From ESN July 2001—20 years ago!]

The following article by Phil Barnes caught my eye, and I was blessed reading it. We all want to be hearing the Lord speak, and who more than elders as they seek to lead in the church? So while we don't often reprint articles, this seemed to come at a good time and meet a real need. Thanks to Christian Missions in Many Lands for letting us use it, and I hope it ministers to your heart too!



### Personal Life

#### Do You Really Want to Hear God's Voice? *by Phil Barnes*

Isn't it amazing how gentle the Lord is? How He always leaves room for us to ignore Him if we really want to? How He often whispers when He could shout? We must understand that's the way it's going to be most of the time if we want to hear what the Lord is saying.

When Moses found himself far from what God made him for, he saw a bush on fire that never burned up. Hmm, something supernatural. Did he want to know? It was out of his way, but he decided to “turn aside and see” (Exodus 3:3). That action changed the course of history. “When the Lord saw that he [Moses] turned aside to look,” God called to him and set in motion His plan (Exodus 3:4). But note that God gave Moses room to carry on his way if that's what he wanted to do. He had a choice, as we do. Do I really want to know what I will be expected to do?

The disciples were helpless in a storm when Jesus came toward them, walking on the water, and seemed about to pass by them (Mark 6:48). “It could be a ghost,”

the disciples may have whispered. “Do we really want to know who this is?”

In Luke 24, two disciples on the Emmaus road were prevented from recognizing Jesus while He explained everything about Himself from the Scriptures. He acted as if He was going to walk farther, and they, too, were forced to a crisis point. Do we want deeper fellowship, a more intimate relationship? Do we want to know?

Remember when, in 1 Kings 19, Elijah was in a funk and the Lord offered to show Himself? A wind rose up so strongly it shattered the rocks, then an earthquake, then a fire—that's more like it, lots of flash, noise, mighty power. But the Lord was not in those. And then came the still, small voice so easily ignored.

You may wonder, What about Saul on the road to Damascus? Yes, he witnessed a revelation he could not dismiss or ignore. However, he was the church's archenemy and Christ's chief persecutor. We may expect it would take more to get Saul's attention than ours. The Lord comes near,

*(Continued on page 3)*

### The Priesthood of All Believers

In the last issue, we looked at the foundational subject of leadership in the church. We now turn to a second major subject, the priesthood of all believers. This is a vast topic, which answers the question, "What place do ordinary people have in the worship and service of the church?" In a summary article, only some major points can be addressed, but that should suffice to highlight our goal in this series. How can these vital truths be confirmed and defended in the local church setting?

### Background of the OT Priesthood

The basic idea of priesthood is access to God. Among God's earthly people Israel, God's original design was an entire nation of priests (Ex. 19:4-6). Sin changed that, and the tribe of Levi was set aside to care for the nation's approach to God. The arrangement of the temple barred the way to God's presence, and access was very limited to one man (the High Priest), on one day a year under strict conditions. The picture was clear: God is holy; ordinary people must not draw near.

What a contrast we have under the New Covenant! The writer of Hebrews presents the superiority of Christ, the Great High Priest, thus establishing a heavenly priesthood for a heavenly people. No longer are an earthly temple or altar or sacrifice needed. Through His work on the cross, sins that previously were only covered (the Hebrew word "atone-ment") have been paid for, and the veil or curtain that closed the way has been torn. Now every believer is invited: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith..." (Heb. 10:22). Without this access,

fellowship with God and spontaneous worship would be impossible. Dr. Frederick Tatford remarks that "all communion is reciprocal," that is, bringing worship to God and receiving blessings from God. He says, "The church is dependent for its communion with God upon the efficacy of the priestly work of its Lord."

### New Covenant Believers are all Priests

Writing to believers throughout the Roman Empire, Peter calls them all "a holy priesthood," "a royal priesthood," (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Describing them as "newborn babes" (v. 2), and "living stones" (v. 5) the context makes it clear that the reference is to ordinary Christians rather than any special group within the church. The apostle John agrees. He writes to those who are loved by the Lord, "washed from our sins in His own blood," and "made us a kingdom of priests unto our God..." (Rev. 1:5,6).

Every new believer must be taught this truth, and embrace it as part of the heritage of all who are "in Christ." It is a foundational truth of the NT assembly, and has important implications for spiritual maturity through practical involvement in worship and service.

### Good Leadership Safeguards Sound Doctrine

If we let nature take its course, people will let those who they think to be more qualified care for worship and service within the church while they become spectators. The "equipping of the saints" (Eph. 4:12) requires several important ingredients that elders must safeguard. For one thing, good teaching of sound

doctrine is critical. Secondly, the assembly must be an environment where practical application of truth is encouraged and applied. Finally, nothing in the leadership structure should work against all of this, i.e., no professional clergy to whom spiritual functions are reserved.

As elders watch over the church and its functioning, vigilance is required as the enemy will undermine this truth, and seek to discredit biblical principles that lead to spiritual maturity. Two points especially deserve notice.

### Practical Outworking May Contrast with Traditional Christianity

Peer pressure is powerful, and young believers can be more impressed by what "most churches do," than by careful Bible study. This is made more difficult when we note that many evangelical churches include a mention of the priesthood of the believer in their doctrinal statements! The answer does not lie in judging or criticizing other groups, but in living out practically what is being taught publicly.

Elders and Bible teachers cannot assume new folks will understand the difference between theory and practical outworking! Truth must be expounded from the Scriptures, and demonstrated in assembly life. If the

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Lord calls one to serve privately, he does not need "permission" from the authorities. If the Lord calls to special service or to the mission field, he does not need to wait until he is

*(Continued on next page)*

“ordained.”

Many are oblivious to the work of the devil against this doctrine. Some churches are filled with saints sitting in silence while “holy communion” and “spiritual ministry” are carried out before them by professionals. Gifts lie dormant while teaching comes through one man, the Spirit’s leading in worship and service is mostly unavailable to the “laity,” and the common impression is that God loves to have it so. The NT assembly should shine like a beacon amid this darkness.

**Practical Exercise is not Compromised by Differing Roles**

Another area in which sound teaching is needed, is to help believers distinguish between priesthood as the birthright of every child of God, and the differing roles to which we are assigned by God to preserve order in the church. Just as in the Holy Trinity, where each person of the Godhead assumed a different role to accomplish redemption, yet were always equal in glory, majesty, and


deity, so the believer must value the position of being a priest to God yet functioning in different ways and times in various settings.

Take a simple example. Believer priests whether men or women may worship or pray, or serve as they are led throughout the week. However, when the church gathers, God requires that the men lead in public worship or ministry, the women supporting this by being silent.

Now it is important to understand that speaking audibly is never a requirement for worship or prayer. God hears silent and audible worship or prayer equally well. The question then, is not access to God at all, but rather one of leadership! God wants men to learn to lead in their families and in the church.

Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians that gifts, ministries and leadership functions differ within the body as the Head assigns to each. But because of their position “in Christ,” all believers have the right and privilege to draw near to God through Christ. Spiritual sacrifices to be offered include

presenting our bodies to God (Rom. 12:1), the sacrifice of praise, doing good works, and sharing with one another (Heb. 13: 15,16). With all such priestly sacrifices God is well pleased.

In conclusion, elders have a solemn responsibility to safeguard the truth of the priesthood of every believer, making sure that the doctrine is both taught and lived out by ordinary saints within the life of the assembly. Observing participation at the Lord’s Supper and the prayer meeting is one indicator of assembly health. Some good questions for discussion: Are elders and deacons overseeing the active involvement of the believers in temporal and spiritual ministry, or are 10% of the people (leadership) doing 90% of the work? Are younger men being trained to shepherd small groups, preach the Word and desire to help with future leadership as the Lord may lead? Prayer is important, and planning does not quench the Holy Spirit’s work to make prayers become realities! 

**God’s Voice** (continued from page 1)

whispers, and catches our eye but gives us room to ignore Him if we want to. Why is that, do you suppose?

In Luke 8, when the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in a parable, Jesus replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, ‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand’” (v. 10, NIV). Jesus used parables to hide the truth from those who didn’t want to know. Do we want to know?

Sadly, today, many professing believers are consumed with conspir-

acy theories, the many secrets *They* don’t want us to know. Yes, an evil mastermind works behind the scenes,


wickedly manipulating every aspect of the kingdom of this world, but why have Christians started to behave as though Satan’s work is new? It began in Genesis 3. The

Lord grants us knowl-

edge of the secrets of the kingdom of God, but we don’t want to know. We become consumed with trying to discover and expose the secrets of the kingdom of this world when they were exposed long ago in the Bible.

Peeling the lid off global conspiracies will not get you where the Lord

wants you. Listening for the still, small voice; turning aside to that bush you see burning out of the corner of your eye; pursuing the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God—that will radically alter the course of your life. You will join the ranks of those who defy pharaohs, walk on water, and dine with the risen Christ.

But we can easily ignore the bush and the whisper, and He will let us. We cry out, “If only God would speak to me loudly and clearly.” In so doing, we pander to our willful determination to ignore God by blaming it on Him for not shouting. 

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## Wives' Corner

### Behold Your King by Maria Forcucci

“When the King saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she found favor in his sight and he held out to Esther the golden scepter.”

—Esther 5:2

What a beautiful scene to imagine! Knowing that being queen did not exempt her from the consequences of approaching the King without being summoned, Queen Esther courageously entered his court. How things might have been different if he hadn't held out that scepter!

Esther is clearly in danger because of the edict that death can result from approaching the king without being summoned. She wisely prepared for her breach by fasting and praying and getting others to do so. We understand that she put herself not into the king's hand but God's when she said, “If I perish, I perish.” But what might we surmise of the king?

I, for one, am interested to know what might have been going through the king's mind when he saw Queen Esther approach. After all, he was very busy considering national security, financial burdens, treachery, etc.

Did he really have time to entertain some female folly?

It is interesting to note that in Es. 5:2, the King saw *Queen* Esther but that he decided to hold out the golden scepter to *Esther*—his wife. Might we imagine the king missing Esther after not seeing her for 30 days? She was the woman who caught his eye and, I believe, won his heart and his trust. Esther might have proven herself trustworthy in their marriage so why would he fear or reject her now? She might have been the very one he needed most at the moment.

Of course, this is all conjecture, and we do take by faith that God had sovereignly ordained the circumstances exactly as they unfolded. In contrast, when I consider going to the throne of my King, I can confidently expect Him to hold out the golden scepter for me—every time!

Humanly, I am no more “of Him” than Esther was of her Persian husband. But like Ahasuerus with Esther, God has taken me and made me His. I hope it is not blasphemous

to compare Our Lord with a pagan king, but as I consider the tenderness with which Ahasuerus spoke to Esther, saying she could ask even up to the half of his kingdom, I can only get excited to wonder how God feels when I humbly come to Him!

As My heavenly Father is dealing with global dangers, hate crimes, Presidential elections, immorality of every

kind, trouble in the Church, can I suppose He is somehow comforted by seeing me approaching His throne, that He is as happy to see me as I, Him? It is a great thought, anyway.

Considering all these things, the fact that I can be bold going to God, that He is happy to sit with me, that He has made me His and “of Him” and “in Him,” is almost too much to take in. How much more then, to consider how short the comparison of Ahasuerus falls! Our God holds out the golden scepter to us every time. More than this, something the pride of man would never allow: He laid His scepter down and came close to us!

*Like Ahasuerus with  
Esther, God has taken me  
and made me His.*

## 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.