



Editor's Note

As we come to the end of another publishing year, I'd like to mention a few things that sometimes get overlooked.

First, a warm welcome to our new subscribers! Thank you for requesting and reading ESN or APA. We trust it's a blessing in your life and ministry. Where are most new subscriptions coming from? From Latin America for the Spanish edition, "Apuntes para Ancianos"! All past articles in Spanish and English are now online in the archives—complete from the beginning.

Second, we enjoy feedback. Send us your

suggestions for article subjects or improvements. Tell us what you like or even what you don't like.

Third, sometimes we get the question, "When will the hints for money or the giving envelope come?" Hopefully, never. As they say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" By God's grace, it's not broke. We could say, "Free as the Lord provides," but I prefer "Free because the Lord does provide."

Enjoy the articles, and give the Lord thanks!



Elders & Missions

Step 1: Put Missions back on the Elders' Radar *by Jim Fleming*

WHY? Why would we talk about elders and missions in a publication that focuses on building up and ministering to elders and then helping them to function as shepherds in the local church? Because God does. In Isaiah's time God called out, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah responded and became God's mouthpiece to the nations of his day (Isa. 6:8). Christ turned the call into a commission based on His own mission, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). Jesus was talking to His leaders. He still is. That would include most of us reading ESN today. "If a commission by an earthly king is considered an honor, how can a commission by a Heavenly King be considered a sacrifice?" David Livingstone writes in his biography. Elders, it is our privilege to be God's instruments to call leaders in this generation to continue Christ's commission. So "Elders & Missions" should be on the same radar screen.

WHO? The New Testament Assemblies or Brethren movement, which has now been in existence for almost 200 years, is not a very large percentage of the total evangelical population of the world. In fact, that is an understatement. We constitute a minuscule percentage of the total. Assemblies are not that widely known by the average evangelical today in the West. However, the assembly movement has had an exponentially huge impact on foreign

missions over the past two centuries in relation to their size in the missionary-sending countries. In many countries across South America, Africa and Asia, the assembly movement would be relatively well known. Once again, not because of the large number of assembly congregations, but because of the impact of the missionaries and the continual emphasis on missions in these assemblies, many of which are now starting to send out their own missionaries cross-culturally.

But what does that have to do with elders reading ESN today? I believe the initial question begins to propose the answer within

itself. If our impact as a missionary-sending movement is going to continue, the elders in the assemblies of the West need to keep missions at the forefront of ministry objectives and assembly life. The commission of the Lord Jesus is not "Stay and study." It is "Go and grow"! Both are vital.

One without the other

results in an unbalanced church movement! We need well-grounded, well-taught believers. Simultaneously, one of the greatest motivators for studying God's Word is when churches mobilize the taught to use their knowledge for evangelism, discipleship, and the formation of new local churches. Elders, if you want to see your congregation come alive, motivate them to national and international missions! When you get your focus off yourselves and onto the

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Our fourth and final subject for churches seeking to follow and defend the NT pattern is the Headship of Christ. Usually placed at the beginning of a series, it concludes the study in this case as “the bottom line.” All other distinctives lose meaning if they are not in place to honor and obey the Head of the church. Scripture illustrates this principle with the “Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1) coming as the final book in the Bible.

First, we considered the Lord’s plan for church leadership: elders. Next we studied the people of the church: the equal priesthood of all believers. We thought about the nature of the church itself; and now we want to explore some ways that the church gives practical expression to the Lord’s position as Head and Center. Merely including this point in doctrinal statements is not enough! We must apply it practically in every facet of the church’s life and function.

Paul warns of a danger that saints and churches may become inflated with pride and “not holding the Head” (Col. 2:18-19). And, as we know, Christian marriages picture this God-given headship relationship: “Therefore as the church is subject to Christ...in everything” (Eph. 5:24), which provides a doctrinal foundation for healthy marital relationships.

A Needed Reminder

Before we cover specifics, we must remind ourselves of a basic point. The Lord is seeking hearts that love Him, desiring to please Him in every possible way. The church, then, becomes the place where such hearts give visible expression to that love by the overflow of the “hidden man of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4) toward Him and toward one another. It’s easy to forget this and imagine that what the Lord is primarily seeking is proper church order. If hearts are warm and the Spirit of God ungrieved, this overflow will be seen in worship, in service, and in outreach! Without it, as someone has said, we have merely “the whirl of religious machinery.”

However, this love relationship is not simply a private or emotion based inner experience. It takes seriously the

Lord’s question, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46), and that certainly includes His words through the apostles regarding church order. In fact, the context of the admonition in 1 Cor. 3, “But let every man take heed how he builds on it,” shows it refers primarily to the building of the church.

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A love relationship wants to please the One it loves. Thus it seeks to come as close as possible to His instructions and the intent of His heart for His own! Without apology, we pattern the church’s meetings and conduct after the design He gave at the beginning to fulfill His promise to build the church. We are not free to “turn everyone to his own way.” Incidentally, this illustrates the difference between legalism and obedience.

Practical Ways to Uphold NT Church Truth

How then can we protect and uphold the Lord’s design in our own assembly?

There are many ways, and space allows only the briefest mention of a few with some relevant Scriptures. Note that the first four items refer to things in which the early church continued steadfastly (Acts 2:42).

We must give a prominent place to Bible teaching and doctrine. The Word is our authority and top priority; from it flows all else. Elders and gifted men “labor in the word and doctrine” to equip the saints. (1 Tim. 5:17;

Eph. 4:11,12.)

Fellowship emphasizes relationships, both vertical (with the Lord) and then horizontal (with one another). The warmth and fruitfulness of the latter is only as good as the genuineness of the former. (1 John 1:1-4.)

The ordinances (baptism and the Lord’s supper) picture our union and communion with Christ. The early church broke bread on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) and NT churches characteristically begin each week gathered around the Lord in the midst. It is a time to remember Him, which brings forth worship in Spirit and in truth.

Prayer made to the Father in the name of the Name of the Lord Jesus is practiced in private, in the church gathered, and in smaller groups in homes and informal settings. (1 Tim. 2.)

The local church is autonomous and interdependent (not independent) in its fellowship with other churches and saints.

No denominational names are taken, either by congregations or believers. The Lord’s people are saints, believers, Christians, disciples, brethren (or brothers/sisters,) etc., but never sectarian names.

Roles assigned by God reflect the Godhead and encourage the development of male leadership in the church and family.

The gospel is taken out to the world rather than expecting the world to come to the church (Gen. 3:9; Luke 19:10). The assembly is never addressed as a mixed

multitude but rather follows the example of all the apostles in addressing the saints.

There is no professional clergy; all believer priests are gifted for service (1 Pet. 4:10). The Lord’s servants are not professionals, but equip the saints for “the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12). *Pastor* is neither a title nor

an office, and does not describe a church administrator, but one of many available

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spiritual gifts.

Mature believers learn to use careful terminology in spiritual things, e.g., referring to the local assembly as “this body,” or describing certain believers as “brethren.”

Once again, it cannot be over-emphasized that these elements of church government and order do not create devotion to the Lord, but they can help preserve it and express our love for Him and His wise plan for His work on earth. Accordingly:

- Elders should base their decisions in such matters on a study of the Word, and be open to hearing other viewpoints which might add insights or instruct others.
- For the sake of new believers, young people growing up in the church, and saints coming into fellowship from other connections, elders should take opportunities to explain from Scripture “why we do what we do.”

- Traditions can have a place in safeguarding important biblical principles, but they must never have greater authority than God’s Word.
- Local churches may cooperate in godly activities, graciously respecting one another’s differences in secondary matters.


Series Conclusion

The church needs active, Christ-like elders! Letting nature take its course brings ruin to society and the church. Those who lead and teach must know their Bibles on these subjects, and then they must watch and uphold the practical expression of it in the life of the assembly. This will not always be popular! It should be done in a humble, gracious, Christ-like manner, but it must be done.

We know that Paul’s final letter in the Bible is Second Timothy. Do you know what his last warning was in that book? In 2 Tim 4:3, he spoke of a time

when the attitude of many in the church toward sound doctrine would be, “I can’t stand it.” Instead, people will seek teachers who tickle their ears and they will

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consequently “be turned unto fables.” How interesting that this final warning is not about the wickedness of the world, but apostasy in the church. Thus he exhorts Timothy to, “Preach the word...” (v.2). May the Lord build within us the strong conviction that God’s design is wise, and cannot be improved upon—in any culture or in any age! 

Missions (continued from page 1)

Lord, the dynamic transition starts to affect the heart, because the infectious heart of Christ draws us to love the world even as He does.

In my estimation and having seen it happen in countries all over the world, the most thrilling day in the calendar of an assembly is when one or more new believers are baptized. Baptisms enthuse and move the assembly like nothing else. Baptism day is evidence of local missions in action! Conversion growth is the great motivator of the church. Then elders notch the process up one more step. The Lord’s commission is to baptize new believers in all nations.


John Stott often said, “We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God.” The Lord blesses the local assembly that captures His passion for the nations. Don’t let this misconception stymie your vision: the misconception that the local assembly must first be large in number, strong in

finances, and overflowing with leadership before it has the capacity to send people to the foreign mission field.

I have observed both in the West and in developing countries now sending missionaries cross culturally that it is often the smaller assemblies that have the vision for missionary outreach. The larger assemblies can become so busy with their multiplicity of programs, with their finances tied up in paying the staff required to run all those programs, and the constant pressure of maintaining church growth, that foreign missions becomes an afterthought for the budget and the vision for growth. Foreign missions

should be a primary focus. Fortunately, there are many large assemblies that send and support multiple missionaries. In many cases I believe the Lord has blessed those assemblies with significant growth precisely because, since their inception, they were globally focused, sending out and supporting missionaries.

Paul was the global Christian *par excellence*. He was both an elder and a missionary statesman. He summarizes this vision and mission when he tells the Corinthian church, “But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s area of influence. Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (2 Cor. 10:15-16 ESV). Paul’s mission was to bring the gospel to the Corinthians, see them saved and mature in their faith in order that their influence through the gospel would reach “lands beyond you.” Even as elders are the Lord’s instruments for church leadership, so missions are God’s mechanism for global church growth.

Step 1’s purpose is simply to remind us of this partnership and rekindle a passion for local and international missions in the hearts of this generation’s elders. If this article puts missions back on some elders’ radar, it has achieved its purpose! This is just the beginning of the journey. There are more steps ahead. 

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Conversion growth is the great motivator of the church.

Wives' Corner

The Gracious Woman by Marti Miller

“A gracious woman retains honor...”
—Proverbs 11:16

Earlier this year I wrote about the woman of Proverbs 31. We considered her character as one that was morally strong. She was careful in her appearance and wise in her behavior. There is so much to learn in the Proverbs about the character of a godly woman.

The Proverbs speak often of the immoral woman, the crafty woman, the evil woman, the foolish woman, the hateful and the adulterous woman—all obvious and vile characteristics. In fact, it speaks more of the women we don't want to be than the women we do want to be! My personal struggle is that I tend to be contentious and I find that I am not alone in this.

I love my husband, so I don't want to be the kind of woman that would cause him to seek the corner of the housetop (Prov. 25:24). Nor do I wish to be the woman who practices contention like the annoying drip of rain or the constant dripping faucet that just won't stop (Prov. 27:15)! Why am I contentious at times?

Am I tired, or hungry, and, like a young child, am I selfishly demanding my way? Or could it be that I, like Eve, am making decisions or demands of my husband that are not mine to make? Am

I seeking to control and push him in the direction I think is important? Am I being submissive, giving him the freedom to lead? I have been challenged in this recently as I seek to memorize 1 Peter 3.

My husband loves the Lord. He treasures the Word and teaches it well. Yet we don't always agree in life and I


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find myself struggling with this command from Scripture: “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives” (1 Pet. 3:1).

As I have stated before, our words and conduct matter, whether we have a believing husband or not. Right out of the gate, Peter says, “be submissive to your husbands that even if some do not obey the word...” I stop here to point out that this phrase includes both the obedient and disobedient husbands. And not only that, the verse says to women that they are

not to be disobedient in word or conduct because that will not help or “win” their husbands.

My point is that my persistent speech (nagging) does not help him, nor does my pouting, huffing, or angry silence! If I simply and lovingly yield, giving honor to him as the authority of our home, then I have done what the Lord asks of me and He is able to work in my husband to be the leader that pleases God. To the man he says, “dwell with them with understanding, giving them honor” or value. We may be weaker in many ways but we are still valued and “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7).

This woman is the one who is called virtuous in Proverbs 31:10. Her husband values her quiet strength and service as she supports him in life and service for the Lord. She doesn't manipulate or coerce him but with grace and diligence, quietly and lovingly serves him. Together they grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord, upholding each other in value or honor. May the Lord help each of us to glorify Him in this. 

“The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil, all the days of her life.”
—Proverbs 31:11-12

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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.

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers” 1 Peter 5:2a NKJV