




Editor's Note

As days darken and the love of many grows cold (Matt. 24:12), I am increasingly thoughtful about how to encourage elders who may be discouraged. True encouragement is not a temporary fix or mere sentimentality but something potentially life changing. Consider this statement about

the Lord as He was facing a more difficult situation than we ever will: "... having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end." (John 13:1).

"Unto the end." By His grace you have come this far; keep your eyes on Him and trust Him to keep you faithful no matter what! 

New Testament Overview

Acts, Part 3 by Warren Henderson

Luke penned more of the New Testament than any other writer. The "beloved physician," followed his "former account" (the Gospel of Luke; 1:1) with information about the founding of the Church and its sway in the Roman Empire. Accordingly, *Acts* provides an historical bridge between the offering of Christ in the Gospels, and the wisdom of God in Christ explained in the Epistles.

Though some have called this book *The Acts of the Apostles*, it is better referred to as *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*. Acts refers to the Holy Spirit fifty-seven times. Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Church was created at Jerusalem during the Feast of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit then gifted, enabled, and guided the apostles and other believers to fulfill their callings within the Body of Christ. The early Church was Spirit-unified, God-dependent, and Christ-preaching, and consequently rocked the world despite being intensely persecuted by Rome.

Acts addresses the quandary of how the Jewish Messiah became the Head of a largely non-Jewish Church. Because of Israel's rejection, God's invitation of salvation was to be preached to the entire world (Matt. 11:28-30). God told Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him; the good news message of Jesus Christ, Abraham's descendant, fulfills this promise (Gen. 12:3).

Acts commences with Luke's retelling of Christ's commissioning of His disciples and His ascension at the Mount of Olives. The book concludes with Paul's first imprisonment in Rome about thirty years later. Earlier, Christ had instructed His disciples to only preach the Kingdom Message to "the lost sheep of Israel." However, after His resurrection, the gospel of grace was to be proclaimed initially

at Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, and then throughout the world (1:8). The Lord commanded His followers to be "witnesses" for Him wherever He placed them in the world (6:7, 9:31, 12:24-25, 16:5, 19:20, etc.). Despite warnings and the painful retaliation of the Pharisees, the Apostles obeyed the Lord and continued preaching the gospel. As a result, disciples were multiplied and added to the Church (Acts 4-5).

Previously, the Lord Jesus had entrusted Peter with the keys of the Kingdom (Matt. 16:19), so Peter is present each time a new phase of gospel expansion is unlocked: in Jerusalem/Judea (ch. 2; 4:14-16), in Samaria

(8:14-17) and to the Gentile world (ch. 10). For this reason, Luke's narrative focuses largely on Peter's ministry in the first twelve

chapters, but then switches to Paul's exploits in the remainder of his book.

Acts may be outlined as follows:

- The Introduction (Acts 1)
- The Formation of the Church (Acts 2)
- The Early Church at Jerusalem (Acts 3-5),
- Three Key Figures (Acts 6-9)
- Peter's Ministry Beyond Jerusalem (Acts 10-12)
- Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14)
- The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)
- Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 16-18:22)
- Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-21:14)
- Paul's Journey to Rome as a Prisoner (Acts 21:15-28:31)

The three key people of Acts 6-9 are Stephen, the first martyr, Philip the evangelist, and

The early Church was Spirit-unified, God-dependent, and Christ-preaching, and consequently rocked the world.

(Continued on page 3)

Leadership Principles

Elders: Men Who Need Courage *by Jack Spender*

The original title for this article was going to be “Elders: Men of Courage,” and that’s surely true. It takes real courage to serve in an arena where one comes against “the gates of hell.” Many great movies have been made about world wars and other wars, but they all have one thing in common; you can “see” the enemy. Contrast this with the forces of the gates of hell; they are invisible! No wonder the instruction: “Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart” (Psa. 27:14).

Here is a great verse for all Christians, but especially needful for church elders. We live in dark days, and despite what the politicians tell us, things are not expected to improve. Thus, a brief meditation on this word, *courage*, should be worthwhile. What is courage; why is it needed; where does it come from, and can it be developed if it is lacking?

What is Courage?

The word courage is derived from an old Anglo-French word “coer” meaning heart. A simple definition is: “mental or moral strength to resist opposition, danger, or hardship.” The opposite of a courageous heart is a fearful heart as seen in the KJV word “faint-hearted.” Pertaining to the heart, it is related to a person’s inner or spiritual condition. Obviously, the more opposition, danger, or hardship a person might face, the greater the need for a courageous heart; surely a good word for those who lead people and churches!

Look at the verse quoted above. If “good courage” indicates sufficient mental or moral strength to resist troubles, then lack of courage indicates low resistance. Note that there is no reference to victory or success, but only to resistance; the ability to stand firm when attacked. Also, there must be a connection with the human will, because “be of good courage” is a command, and God never commands us to do what we are incapable of. Finally, this verse tells us that courage may be increased by waiting on the Lord.

Related Verses

Before we go further, let’s remind ourselves of a couple verses that bear on the subject.

Prov. 4:23 says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” Courage, like all of the other virtues won’t just “show up” while we are inactive. We need to take it seriously, to guard the condition of our heart.

Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that the human heart “is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” It doesn’t say “the unsaved heart.” One step toward spiritual maturity is learning the truth of this verse. Our hearts are naturally wicked according to the Creator Who knows “the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). When we are born again, the wicked heart does not say goodbye and move on! In salvation, God does not rehabilitate our sinful heart, but creates a new one, the heart of the new man in Christ, but we must always remember that the flesh (Rom. 7:18) will not be destroyed until we have a new, resurrection body.

Now with only these two verses—and there are many others—we are faced with an interesting question. How can a true believer, one with a heart created in Christ Jesus, have a fearful heart, i.e., be faint-hearted? With Christ in us, are we not just living above fear and faint-heartedness automatically? No, we are not. A person, though saved, living in a fallen world, confined to a “mortal body” and subject to the influences of a corrupt nature must turn to the Scriptures for help.

And what does he read? “Be of good cheer [courage] for I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The man in Christ can stand firm because he can say, “Not I, but Christ” (Gal. 2:20). Wonderful position, but the believer must exercise the faith to lay hold of this truth practically. Faith plus the outworking in life experience is essential.

Personal Courage

Courage, then, is gained just like all the other Christian virtues. Read 2 Peter 1 and note that all these admirable qualities are to be “added.” They are potentially

our portion in Christ, but it is through active faith that we add them. Hebrews 5:14 states the principle of repeated practical exercise in character development.

This gives encouragement when we understand that we can work on the development of virtues like courage when we face even the smallest trials and adversities in our daily walk. We work and we pray, but then we “wait on the Lord,” that is, we depend on Him, we trust Him to choose the perfect means and the ideal timing to accomplish His plan. Exactly how is this done?

There is no substitute for spending time with the Lord. As we study the life of the Lord Jesus, we learn what the combination of grace and courage are to look like. As we pray,

- We can tell Him that we have done all we could on a matter of concern and ask Him to show us if that is not true,
- We can ask for patience to wait for His leading,
- We can ask for the strength to act courageously when the time to act has come,
- We can even confess our natural fearfulness in a difficult matter,
- And we need patience.

The developing of a courageous heart becomes evident in time. “The righteous are bold as a lion” (Prov. 28:1). It is interesting that both Joshua (Josh. 23:6) and David (1 Chr. 22:23) link courage with obedience to God’s word!

Courage in Assembly Work

Any team such as an elder board is only as good as the people that compose it. Personalities and spiritual gifts differ among individuals, but far from be-

(Continued on next page)

There must be no one in the group holding it back from righteous decisions and a firm stand for truth because he is uncomfortable with confrontation.

ing a drawback, this is actually one of the strengths of NT church leadership. Therefore, not every brother will have the same degree of courage in difficulties. But that is not the point. The point is that whether a man be a docile and timid soul, or an outgoing personality, there must be no one in the group holding it back from righteous decisions and a firm stand for truth because he is uncomfortable with confrontation, either of people or of issues. All warfare requires confrontation.

Some responsibilities of elders can usually be handled quietly:

- Acts 20:30—Watching the leadership


team for the emergence of dangerous men.

- 1 Thes. 5:15—Seeing (“see to it”) “that no one repays evil for evil.”
- Acts 11:30—Making sure assembly resources are properly handled.

Other responsibilities are more confrontational:

- Acts 15—Gathering with others in leadership to discuss and resolve disputes, especially when public or open.
- Titus 1:9—Using the faithful Word to exhort and refute the opposers.

- Titus 1:13—Promoting sound faith by giving a “sharp rebuke” where needed.

In conclusion, we can see that privately practicing a courageous stand in lesser matters equips one for strength of heart in weightier matters in public. Any elder who takes these things to heart, depending on (or waiting on) the Lord for help, will see his courage increase over time. As we noted above, this can be a matter of personal exercise, but happy is the man who has the fellowship of like-minded team members for prayer and accountability. 

Acts (cont'd from page 1)

Paul, who initially persecuted Christians, but after the Lord met him on the road to Damascus became an apostle to the Gentiles.

Being commended from the church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas first visited Cyprus, then Pamphylia and southern Galatia on their first missionary journey. Sadly, Barnabas' young nephew John Mark abandoned the apostles at Perga and returned to Jerusalem (13:13). (Through Barnabas' encouragement, John Mark is later restored to fruitfulness.) Thankfully, many believed the gospel message and churches were established before Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to tell of the great things they had witnessed.

After being once again commissioned at Antioch, Paul begins his second missionary journey. They visited the areas in southern Asia that had been previously evangelized, with a goal of building up the new disciples in doctrine. A young believer named Timothy from Lystra joined them, as did Luke at Troas. Then, having been summoned by the Holy Spirit into Europe, the missionary team visited major cities in Macedonia and Achaia before sailing back to Caesarea and returning home to Antioch.


Paul's third missionary journey again began at Antioch. Luke summarized the next phase of their trip: “he [Paul] went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23). Paul went on to Ephesus and there joined with Aquila and Pris-

cilla, who were fellow tentmakers and zealous believers for the Lord (as shown by their diligent care of Apollos in Acts 18). Paul never requested funds for his own ministry, but trusted the Lord to provide for what He wanted accomplished. This meant that Paul was willing to work with his hands to supply his needs. Paul regularly visited the synagogue and the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus to persuade people of the truth. This two-plus-year ministry in a major port city had the effect of broadcasting the gospel message throughout Asia (19:20). After the riot in Ephesus, Paul departed to revisit churches that had been established in Macedonia and Achaia during his second missionary journey. He then returned to Asia through Macedonia and sailed back to Caesarea and made his way to Jerusalem where he was received by his brethren (21:15-17).

To prevent his death by zealot Jews a few days later, Paul was arrested in the temple by Roman authorities. He was then transferred to a prison in Caesarea for safe keeping. While there Paul faithfully shared the truth with officials overseeing his case. However, after two years of imprisonment and the authorities' indecision, Paul appealed his case to Caesar. Because he was a Roman citizen, the authorities in Caesarea sent Paul to Rome. Though his ship was destroyed by a severe storm, Paul's life was preserved so that he could speak of Christ before Roman dignitaries. Although Paul lived about another six years after arriving in Rome, this is where Luke closes his

historical account.

One of the most notable transitions observed in *Acts* is that of Church authority. Initially, church authority rested with the apostles in Jerusalem, but as local churches were being established abroad, the elders of each local assembly became an autonomous leadership for those entrusted into their care. In the opening chapters of *Acts* we do not read of church elders, but at the Counsel of Jerusalem both church elders and the apostles decided important matters (ch. 15). Towards the end of the Apostolic Era, we observe only church elders being responsible for overseeing God's people (e.g. Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:3-4).

The early days of the Church Age were marked by confirming signs such as speaking in tongues, miracles, and healings. These supernatural feats verified the continuation of Christ's authority in His apostles, that the Church would be composed of both Jews and Gentiles, and to warn Israel of forthcoming judgment for rebellion (Acts 2:15-36; Deut. 28:49). In reviewing the New Testament record, the normalcy of these supernatural occurrences greatly diminished after about 60 A.D.; apparently, such wonders had served God's intentions and would no longer be the norm. Nonetheless, *Acts* is an exciting book that demonstrates what believers can do through the power of the Holy Spirit when determined to be holy, obedient, and dependent witnesses for Christ. May we all be filled with the Holy Spirit! 

Wives' Corner

Foundations and the Family Structure *by Marti Miller*

“...all the foundations of the earth are unstable.” —Psalm 82:5b

Have you noticed that societal foundations seem to be crumbling around us? I am not a builder but my husband and I are homeowners. I know that the foundation our house is built upon is important to its integrity and stability. Likewise, I understand that the foundations of the Word are important for the functioning of family life to bring honor and glory to the Lord.

There is a great deal that we as women can do to establish and maintain the spiritual integrity of our homes. First, we must be women of the Word, wholeheartedly devoted to doing our part. We were fashioned to be a helper, an “ezer,” like the Lord. “You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield” (Psa. 115:11).


As wives, we are to support our husbands who are God’s representative heads (1 Cor. 11:3, Eph. 5:23). We are to be subject to him in everything, giving honor and preference to him as the authority figure (Eph. 5:24). Likewise, we are to respect

him in his position as our husband (v. 33). When I disrespect him, I am disrespecting God. When I go over his head or behind his back, I do so to God as well. When I choose to be the decision maker, I totally take myself from the place of protection in which God has placed me. I have begun to destroy the biblical family foundation. When I assume the role God has given the man, I essentially appear to be like Lucifer who sought to be above God (Isa. 14:12-14).

This place of submission, coming under the authority of our husbands, is a very *powerful* place. Satan and the world would have us think that it is a *weak* place, a place of subservience and shame. But that is the furthest thing from the heart of God. When we willingly practice submission, our husbands are then able to fully realize their responsibility to love, provide for and protect their wives and their families. This is part of the unifying mystery of Christ and the church as Eph. 5:28-33 indicates. It is never hard for Christ to love the church, for His love is perfect. Our husbands, though, are learning

to love even as Christ loves. Do we really want to make it hard for him? My willing submission towards my husband allows his loving me to be so much easier. In practice, it is a continuing cycle of love and respect.

It is evident to me that the foundation of biblical principles for the family is being challenged, with the end result being the destruction of the family unit. As the family structure crumbles, the local church is susceptible to crumbling as well. Unless, of course, we get back to the foundation principles of Scripture for the family. You and I, as women of God, are to model this in our homes as well as teach it to young women in our sphere of influence (Tit. 2:5).

May our homes be built on God’s biblical plan, and may we as women be devoted to upholding God’s eternal Word. Matthew 7:26-27: “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” 

THE SMALL PRINT

Elders’ SHOPNOTES is published bimonthly in English and Spanish. We seek to serve elders by publishing short articles that can be read in brief sittings and that are intended to provide practical teaching from a biblical perspective.

E-mail subscriptions. Visit our web site at: www.eldersshopnotes.com. Issues will be sent via e-mail as an attachment which can be printed down or read online. Feel free to pass ESN on to others. E-mail subscriptions (as opposed to postal mail) help us reduce the costs in publishing ESN.

Postal mail subscriptions. If you are unable to access the internet conveniently, write us at the address below and

we will send it via postal mail. Group subscriptions are also available via postal mail. Please indicate how many your group wishes to receive.

Spanish subscriptions. Go to www.apuntes-para-ancianos.org.

Subscription fee. We trust the Lord for the funds to publish ESN. If you would like to be one of the instruments God uses to support this ministry, please mail your gifts to the address below, payable to: Jack Spender. Feedback/comments are welcomed.

Back issues of ESN can be found in the online archives at www.eldersshopnotes.com.

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

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

Specific Bible versions used are indicated at the first quotation in each article.

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.