



Editor's Note

I hope you're enjoying the "Wives Corner" articles. I am!

Recently in our church we did a short series on Biblical Roles in the Assembly. Some consider this a "hot topic." Actually, it was quite interesting, and from the feedback received, it was helpful. It's a subject that's needed today. At times we hear complaints that women are neglected in the assembly. They need a more vocal part. Really? Not if our guidebook is the Scriptures. In them we find that God has given women a sphere for their work, and it is not in duplicating the sphere of work given to men.

It is one in which they find great personal fulfillment.

Looking back over the years, I can testify that women—and especially the wives of elders—have an enormous influence on an assembly. 1 Peter 3:4 tells us that the beauty of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God "of great price." Speaking personally, I'm thankful for His provision of a number of gifted women who enjoy that fulfillment in part by writing articles for ESN to encourage others world-wide, providing what amounts to an "Elders' Wives' ShopNotes"!



New Testament Overview

Part 4: The Pauline Epistles, Romans to Galatians by Warren Henderson

Paul is credited with writing thirteen of the twenty-one New Testament epistles. (He may have penned Hebrews also.) Paul's writing style is logical in construction and draws information from Old Testament Scripture to establish and defend New Testament doctrine. This is especially true of *Romans* and *Galatians*. Generally speaking, Paul's epistles are to Gentile believers. The foreword portions of many of his letters provide the doctrinal basis to compel believers to live for the Lord. Paul generally uses positional truth (i.e. the believer's *position* with Christ) to implore Christians to *practically* live for Christ. *Relationships* are established by acts (birth, adoption, a marriage covenant, etc.), but *fellowship* is dependent upon right behavior. God regenerates and adopts a believer into His family, but God's fellowship with a believer is contingent upon his or her continuing in righteous conduct.

The Pauline epistles were likely written in the following order: *Galatians*, *1* and *2 Thessalonians*, *1* and *2 Corinthians*, *Romans*, *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, *Philemon*, *Philippians*, *1 Timothy*, *Titus*, and *2 Timothy*.

Galatians was written after Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey, while *1* and *2 Thessalonians* were penned during his second foreign journey with Silas. Letters were sent to the Church at Corinth and to the Roman believers during Paul's third missionary journey. *Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon* were penned dur-

ing Paul's first Roman imprisonment (i.e. his fourth missionary journey). His epistles to Timothy and Titus were written in the final years of his life; Paul was again a prisoner in Rome when he wrote *2 Timothy*, his final epistle.

Romans

Persecuted believers likely took the gospel to Rome since Scripture does not record that Paul or any other missionary traveled there prior to the writing of this epistle in AD 56–57. *Romans* is rightly placed as the first epistle in the canon of New Testament Scripture as it thoroughly addresses the fundamental features of the gospel message of Jesus Christ. The main theme of *Romans* is the *Gospel of God* (1:1) or the *Gospel of His Son* (Jesus Christ; 1:9). Keywords and phrases include: "righteous/righteousness," "justification/justify," "salvation," "believing," "faith," and "live/live."

In the first three chapters, Paul shows that all humanity has received some revelation of God's righteousness (creation's design, the human conscience, and God's written word) and has ignored it. Thus, all have sinned and are guilty before God. Paul then shows how God can righteously save the condemned by the act of justification in response to faith in Christ (Romans 4 and 5). What God redeems for Himself, He also cleanses and sanctifies for His purposes (Romans 6–8). God's sovereign dealings with His covenant people, the Jews, in the past,

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This article concludes the subject of “Inspired Warnings about the End Times” begun in the previous issue. We’ll add a few more relevant passages with brief comment, and then offer several practical suggestions for church elders to consider as safeguards.

Sober Warnings, continued

2 Timothy 4:3: Paul’s last warning in his final letter before his death declares that revealed truth (sound doctrine) will be increasingly rejected in the end times, as people seek out teachers who make them feel good. The motivation is a burning desire for pleasure. The modern (and growing) tendency to judge a church by whether it can supply all the desires of one’s family confirms this. As people turn away from truth, God gives them an attraction for what is false. Through the kindness of God, we can provide generously for the saints in the local assembly as we’re reasonably able, but we should be clear that our service and sacrifice is for the Lord, and only as the Lord provides.

James 5:3: While not specifically said of Christians, James’ frequent reference to “brethren” in his letter reminds us that society’s rampant materialism and accumulation of wealth can also affect believers and the church. Many see a prophetic history of the church in the Lord’s seven letters of Rev. 2, 3 where the final stage (Laodicea) pictures the spiritually impoverished church boasting of possessions and wealth.

2 Peter 3:3: Scoffers moved by sinful desires will reject the imminent coming of the Lord. Nothing must interfere with their extravagant plans. Jude (v. 18) speaks of similar mocking in the world motivated by the desires of the flesh. It’s noteworthy how often references to “lust” are part of the end-time warnings about perverted doctrines.

The foregoing list is not exhaustive; other warnings can be found in Hebrews, John’s epistles etc., but these will suffice to highlight the importance

of including appropriate warnings in the Bible ministry of the church.

We turn now to some practical suggestions for elders to consider as they face this challenging task. For the sake of brevity, the following points are simply based on the key activities in which a healthy church will continue as outlined in Acts 2:42.

Some Practical Suggestions

1. Make sure the Bible ministry hour is for equipping, not entertaining (Eph. 4:12).

2. Provide solid expositions of critical passages like Eph. 4:1-16 to show that stability comes with growing spiritual maturity and provides protection against being ensnared by winds of false doctrine.

3. Avoid a negative tone to teaching, or scolding of the saints, even when dealing with warning passages. Paul set a good example in Rom. 5 when dealing with the entrance of sin and death into the human race: “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (v. 20).

4. It’s important for elders to have an understanding of the major Bible doctrines, and even an awareness of how the creeds throughout church history sought to root out heretical teachings and preserve sound doctrine. They were not perfect of course, but they make the point that the church has always had to deal with error. It is called “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15)

5. Provide quality informal fellowship times where people can ask questions, seek clarification, solicit help, and pray for one another when confronted by unfamiliar teachings or even cults.

6. During times of visitation to those in fellowship, include a gentle question or two to be sure they understand the spiritual food being presented. Ask if they would feel comfortable

requesting help if confused or feeling pressured by outsiders who promote error.

7. Hold fast to the weekly remembrance meeting, and protect its Christ-centered approach to worship. Many find it to be unique among Christian churches. It is an excellent defense against the “me-centered” perspective of the world, which can open the door to an experience-oriented “faith.” Remind the saints that our fallen nature will NEVER love or be comfortable in a meeting (or with hymns) that exalt the Lord Jesus. This is for the new man!

8. Encourage balance in the prayer life of the assembly; not just temporal needs and problems but prayers like those in Eph. 1 and 3. We need to ask the Lord to open the eyes of our understanding (1:18), which, among other things, is a critical protection against having one’s faith undermined (Titus 1:11).

Concluding Thoughts


All who lead among the Lord’s people should remember that it is easier to deal with error before it comes in than after it has taken hold. Scripture provides sufficient instruction to ground the believer to stand firmly in truth, so speakers and ministry subjects chosen for the spiritual diet of the flock should be both faithful and relevant. As in a family, all nurture or all admonition is not good for children! Where Scripture comforts, we can comfort; where Scripture warns, we must warn. But even this can be done in a loving, uncritical spirit.

Further, we must ask if the people are really grasping the doctrines we study? Panel discussions, informal question and answer times, home study groups can all provide opportunity to move truth from the head into the heart as those heartwarming words are spoken: “Oh, now I see!” Some groups rush from messages on Sunday to new subjects midweek as if quantity is the

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mother of quality. Better to include some prayer and fellowship to be certain genuine understanding is taking place.

Finally, elders must take every opportunity to include young men in Bible discussions, visitations, and simple decision making whenever

they can so that the assembly will not die out because the older elders have been so protective of their “office” that no one else is allowed in! Time flies, and before long the baton must pass. Blessed is the church that has trained the next generation in sound doctrine and wise, practical application. 

Missions (cont'd from page 1)

present, and future is the subject of Romans 9–11. The practical applications of living out the gospel of Jesus Christ are addressed in the last five chapters of the epistle. *Romans* provides a reasonable and logical basis for the Christian faith and ensures that the foundational doctrines of Christianity are known to the believers in Rome.

1 and 2 Corinthians

Corinth was situated in southern Achaia and likely had a population of over 500,000 people at this time, the majority of whom were slaves. Because Corinth was an immense center for international commerce, it naturally became a hotbed for the most immoral forms of paganism. Paul first came to Corinth in the spring of AD 51 during his second missionary journey and stayed for one and a half years. While at Ephesus (during his third missionary trip), Paul wrote an epistle to the Corinthians which is now lost (1 Cor. 5:9). After Paul learned of misunderstandings and additional problems (1 Cor. 1:11, 16:17) he wrote a second letter from Ephesus, which is titled *1 Corinthians* in our Bibles.

Paul threatened to come with a rod (1 Cor. 4:18-12) if the Corinthians did not correct particular problems and indeed he did sail directly from Ephesus to Corinth for this purpose. He later refers to this brief visit as “a painful trip” (2 Cor. 2:1). After arriving back at Ephesus, Paul wrote a third letter, which “pained” him (2 Cor. 2:3-4). This letter has been lost. After the riot in Ephesus, Paul traveled to Macedonia where he met Titus returning from

Corinth. Titus gave a good report on the Corinthian Christians, but some still questioned his apostleship (2 Cor. 2:13, 6:5-6). Paul responded by composing a fourth epistle, *2 Corinthians*. Paul made a third trip to Corinth, likely during the winter of AD 56–57 (Acts 20:2-3).

In *1 Corinthians*, Paul wrote to transform the behavior of a disorderly group of believers into that which would honor God. Paul affirmed that Christ was their head, that moral integrity was expected of believers, and that they needed to honor Christ by obeying revealed truth concerning Church order and doctrine. The main themes of his first epistle are Christian conduct, Church order, and Church body-life.

The personal themes and content of *2 Corinthians* stand in sharp contrast with the subject matter of the former letter. In *2 Corinthians*, Paul reveals to us his heart and soul for the ministry he had been called to accomplish. He highlights the wonderful benefits of serving the Lord, as well as the value of disappointments, trials, and sufferings in the life of a faithful servant. The final instructions concerning the collection for the saints in Jerusalem was accompanied with teaching on the importance and joy of meeting the needs of others and giving to the Lord. No other Pauline epistle offers such a thorough defense of Paul’s apostleship. Certainly Paul’s divine calling was proven out in fruitful ministry and faithful suffering.

Galatians

Galatians was likely written shortly after Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey, but

before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) in AD 49 and just prior to Paul and Silas’ departure on the second missionary journey. Not long after Paul and Barnabas had returned home, certain law-preachers began to influence the new believers that they had left in Asia Minor. These legalizers taught that a Christian was saved by grace in Christ, but then had to continue in Law-keeping to maintain one’s salvation. Obviously, this was an impossibility for no one could keep the Law completely. Paul calls the legalizers’ message for what it was: a false gospel. The theme of the epistle is salvation by grace through Christ alone.

Paul pointedly conveys to the Galatians that any gospel message that includes human merit as the basis of *earning* favor with God is an affront to

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God. Consequently, Paul aggressively attacked the message and the outcome of legalism throughout the epistle. He also provides the Galatian believers with the right spiritual emphasis in pleasing God: walking in the Spirit, not the flesh. Focusing on externals avail the legalizer nothing before God; it was all of the flesh and for the glory of the flesh.

The epistle may be outlined as follows.

- Introduction (1:1-9)
- Paul Defends His Apostleship and Message (1:10-2:10)
- Paul Defends the Gospel of Grace (2:11-19)
- Justified in Christ by Faith Alone, Apart from the Law (2:20-3:24)
- Believers are Governed by Grace not Legalism (3:25-5:1)
- The Life of Faith is Visible (5:2-6:18).

Wives' Corner

Continuing by Rachel Kichar

“Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’”

—John 6:28, 29

Things haven't been going quite so smoothly around our house lately. With the arrival of our fourth boy a few months ago, all our routines have been disrupted enough to allow some flaws (gasp!) to surface in our children and especially in their mother. When my husband kindly took the older boys on a camping trip for the weekend, I spent the first couple hours of quietness on the couch, hovering somewhere between much-needed sleep and desperate prayer for the Lord's intervention. Then, I picked up a parenting book. It was semi-helpful up until the point where it quoted the verses above. Then, the Sword of the Spirit flashed its hope-gleam!

I've always thought of this verse as it relates to initial salvation: God is not asking us to work for salvation, but to believe in Jesus Christ. But as

I read Kenneth Wuest's *Expanded Translation*, I realized how much further it extends:

“Then they said to Him, What are we to do as a habit of life in order that we may continually be working the works of God? Answered Jesus and said to them, This is the work of God, that you continually be believing on Him whom that One sent off on a mission.”

A habit of life. That's what I've been searching for. A habit of life (schedule, meal plan, school routine) that will smooth all the conflicts, fix all the problems, and get my kids (and me) on the road to Christ-likeness. No, says Jesus. That's not how the works of God get done. Rather, continually be believing. It's rather striking to lay the crowd's assumption of God's will next to God's actual will.

Continually be working? Continually be believing.

We aren't saved by working, but by believing. We don't do the works of God by working, but by believing. Continually believing. Every single

time that a child misbehaves, and I lose the patience which I never really had. Every single time that the sin nature surfaces in any member of our household. Every single time that we get behind schedule, or the plans fall apart, or I forgot to take the meat out of the freezer for dinner. Every single time that our weakness and failure make it obvious that only He can accomplish His work perfectly.

Jesus didn't suggest that we should “believe” in a generic sense. He is very specific. We are to continually be believing on Him Whom God sent off on a mission—because He didn't just start the mission. At the end of His life He could report back to His Father, “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4) As the Vine in Whom we live, He wants to do the working. There is no habit of life that can replace the Life Himself. Every task He puts into our hands is a test, not of our ability, but of our faith; will we try to accomplish it by self-effort, or lift it up to Him with trustful confidence in the Finisher?



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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.

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