



Biblical Principles

To Question or not to Question?

by Chuck Gianotti

Studies in 1 Timothy 6:1-5 (NASB)—Part 15

He said he was just trying to start a conversation, that's all his questions were about. Yes, questions can be innocent, a sign of being a Berean kind of Christian (Acts 17) who wants to make sure what he is hearing is true to Scripture. But sometimes questions can be a veiled challenge to sound biblical doctrine. And I could hear in the fellow's queries an echo from the garden, "Did God really say ...?" (Gen 3:1 NIV).

Sometimes it is not easy to distinguish between innocent questions and those meant to create doubt or lead toward wrong doctrine. The elder must be vigilant, constantly protecting the people of God from doctrinal error and watching out for the sinister methods of the enemy of the church.

The specifics may vary from one generation to another, but one thing remains the same—there will always be false teachers, purveying novel doctrines and supposedly new approaches to spiritual truth and life. Paul warned the Ephesian elders about this in Acts 20:29-30.

In 1 Timothy 6, after a brief comment to slaves about how they should relate to their masters, the apostle returns to the subject of false teachers which he touched on in chapter one. Specifically, he writes that there are some whose purpose in teaching is skewed and goes contrary to sound doctrine promoted by the elders. And it is with these that Timothy (and we) should concern himself.

Paul succinctly instructs Timothy, "Teach and preach these principles" (2). The NIV renders this "teach and urge." He doesn't say, "Enter into a conversation about these things and help them see the more correct way." His terseness when it comes to false teachers is emphatic.

False doctrine in our day can subtly slip in by simply "starting a conversation." There is a movement in North America where long held biblical truths are being "questioned," in the name of simply "starting a conversation." Things like the inerrancy of Scripture, the essence of the Gospel, the nature of the church, etc. It was not without reason that Paul earlier admonished the elders of Ephesus (where Timothy currently resided at the time of Paul's writing) to "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock ..." (Acts 20:28).

Now, on the one hand, who can fault a person for simply wanting to start a conversation? But when people of influence with a large audience do this, doubt can creep into the average believer's mind. It is just this sort of thing that has led some denominations to embrace what they once abhorred.

From the description given in the subsequent verses of Paul's letter, it is clear that nothing is new under the sun. Our age does not differ much from that of Paul. There are people today advocating a "different doctrine that does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness" (3). Two kinds of "sound words" are identified here: a) The direct words of our Lord while on the Earth

An "innocent" question or veiled effort to undermine truth?

and b) doctrines that were subsequently revealed through revelation

to the apostles and inspired writers of Scripture—which things conform to true godliness.

One writer describes godliness as "complete devotion to God." This assessment actually became one of the criteria the early church used to separate out the genuinely inspired writings, which became the NT books, from the spurious writings which did not give evidence of conformity to godliness, or "the rule of faith" as they termed it. If a writing did not conform to that standard of faith that was received from the apostles (see Acts 2:42a – "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ..."), it was to be rejected. Paul, in our passage, warns about those whose teaching does not conform to this kind of godliness.

Only one motive can cause such errant teaching—and that is lack of submission of the false teacher to that which has gone before. Or to put it another way, the exaltation of one's teaching as being better than what the apostles clearly taught or the sound doctrine espoused in the local church – all for the purpose of inflating one's self. That is why Paul says, "he is conceited" (4a). Actually, the Greek word means "shrouded in smoke, to be in the clouds." The conceit of false teaching clouds one's view of knowledge, such that no matter how eloquent or educated he may sound, his teaching is empty. You could say he is blowing smoke and doesn't know it, yet thinks himself quite original and novel. Harsh judgment for any of us to make, for sure, but that is the assessment of the in-

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Leadership Principles

Ownership in the Church

by Jack Spender

Have you ever heard someone speak about the need for people to “take ownership in the assembly”? What does it mean? Is it important? Consider the following illustrations:

- A man who attends the local assembly is a skilled cabinet maker. Year by year, he walks past cabinets in the chapel library with the doors hanging off the hinges and never “sees” the need for repair.

- The elders visit a family who has been coming to the chapel for awhile. During the conversation, the couple begins many of their questions with: “We notice that you people.....”

- The church treasurer reports: “Giving to missions and outside ministries is generous, but the assembly general fund is usually in the red.”

Examples could be multiplied. What’s the real message here? Perhaps mismanagement of resources or a lack of communication, but often it’s an indicator that the people lack a sense of ownership in the local work. This does not mean they aren’t part of the body of Christ; only that they are not sure of their place in our local expression of the body of Christ. Note that the above illustrations apply to the building, the assets and the leadership of what we call the church. In other words, those who speak this way see themselves more as visitors than as part of the family. They feel like they don’t belong. They cannot say “my spiritual family.”

Someone will object: “We know that the church is not a building; it’s the people. If these folks are truly saved, and have been received into fellowship, then they have no right to feel this way.” In theory that’s true. But we are dealing here with perceptions, and good leaders care about how things are perceived. Let’s think about this problem, and what can be done to correct it.

The Importance of Perceptions

To begin, the dictionary defines “perceive” as “to become aware of something through the senses,” and perception as “any insight, knowledge or intuitive judgment arrived at by perceiving.” The Lord Jesus often criticized those who did not perceive (or understand) things that should have been clear

to them (e.g., Mark 7:18; 8:17 KJV).

But just as people can be slow to perceive what we think is obvious, they can sometimes be alert to things about which we may be blind! And this takes us to the heart of this matter of ownership in the assembly. Without realizing it, those in leadership may be sending signals that say: “This local church is owned and controlled by a certain group of people, and you are not part of that group; you are not ‘insiders.’” How can this be?

A man once told me, “When I visit a church, I immediately look for two things: Who makes the decisions and who controls the money? That tells me who owns the work.” Not everyone will agree with this or think it a good thing, but it does make one point. People have their own criteria for deciding who “owns” things, and very often those criteria are taken from the world. That may not matter to us, but when it becomes a barrier that prevents young believers or new people from getting involved and growing, it should matter.

The Church has no Caste System

The true New Testament assembly is not a democracy, but an equal brotherhood of believers with older, mature men leading as under-shepherds accountable to Christ. It is also a family in which the members share an unlimited liability for one another. There are no “second class” family members.

Certainly a mature believer will give and serve “as unto the Lord,” as the “What’s in it for me?” attitude of the world gives way to Christ-centered fellowship and service. But must the primary growth of the church come through attracting Christians who are already mature? Despite the baggage they may bring, discipling new Christians and immature Christians must be a big part of our work. An essential part of that process is to absorb them into the heart of family life in the assembly. Though they cannot lead and their serving may be sketchy for awhile, they quickly sense whether or not they are accepted by the “regulars” as true family members.

The Practical Side

What are some practical things that

contribute to a sense of ownership in the local work, a feeling of belonging to the family? To name just a few:

- Being known by name (especially to those in leadership) [You matter to us]

- A voice (input) in decision making [Your thoughts matter to us]

- Tangible (not just theological) evidences of love. [We honestly care about you]

- Discovery of gift and participation in a *significant* ministry [We need you]

- Being appreciated [We thank the Lord for you]

- Receiving occasional visits from the elders. [You are worth sacrificing for]

- Being included in “what’s happening” [You are part of the group]

- Having unfamiliar terms and expressions explained [We want you to be “in the know”]

I remember the testimony of a couple who had come to our assembly as a young family from the midwest. The wife related the story: “We planned to visit each Bible believing church in the area once. Our first Sunday we came to this assembly, a church we were not familiar with. After the meetings, a family invited us for lunch. In the evening there was a baptism and somehow I got involved helping with towels for the women being baptized. Then there were refreshments to serve. Friendships were made, plans for next Sunday, and honestly, we never did get to visit another church. We found a home and stayed.”

To use an analogy, owners of a house will sacrifice energy and resources; visitors will be reluctant to build in someone else’s house. Owners will not drift off; visitors will. Owners have incentive to endure hardship that comes with the work; visitors don’t.

Elders can play a major part in this goal of helping people make the transition from outsiders to “owners.” But it may require some sacrifice, like letting go of things that younger or newer believers can do. Change is never comfortable and long established traditions resist change fiercely. However, the blessings of seeing people move from the outside edge of involvement into a secure place in the local fellowship, is something worth sacrificing for.



The Time Crunch—Some Practical Ideas

by Mary Gianotti

There never seems to be enough time! How often have you felt that way? The fact that you are an elder's wife adds to the time crunch. Elders meetings, phone calls, unexpected interruptions are just a few of the things that require time from our husbands. Recently I was discussing this with a woman who has three children under five and her husband is one of two elders. The challenge they have of balancing family and the responsibilities of being an elder is difficult.

I'd like to share a few practical ideas that have helped me and may help you as a wife and mother in this unique and privileged position:

Recognize that the beginning sentence in this article is not true. The truth is, "God has given us exactly the right amount of time to accomplish His will." The difficult thing about that statement is if it

seems true, that may be an indication I need to make some changes in my life.

Refresh my Attitude – I need to remind myself what God says about my husband's role as an elder. In 1 Timothy 3:1 we are told that the man who sets his heart on being an elder desires a noble task. Paul writes that it was the Holy Spirit who laid this burden of being an elder on my husband (Act 20:28 NIV). I need to thank God this moment for giving my husband this desire to shepherd His

people. I need to let him know that I appreciate all he does. My husband has told me there are times when I am the only one who knows he needs encouragement. What a blessing to have the right attitude and be able to increase his desire (through my encouragement) for this often difficult but God-given work.

Communicate with the Calendar – Once a month or so I sit down together with my calendar and mark church events, elders meetings and appointments. This will reduce the stress of my husband announcing at dinner that there is a meeting he needs to attend in an

ers that have been huge time savers for me. A magnetic shopping list pad on the side of my refrigerator with a pen tied to it, allows me to write down any items I run out of while preparing meals. Before I go grocery shopping, I take a few minutes to write out a menu for the week. This assures me that I will purchase all the needed recipe items, saving time each day and preventing unnecessary trips to the store. I also carry a small 3x5 inch spiral note book in my purse. This is where I record things that come to mind when I am out. It has been one of the best organizational tips I have implemented.

Carve out Time Alone – When my children were babies I used the first part of their nap time to spend with the Lord. On occasion I would ask my husband to watch the kids for a couple of hours. I'd take my Bible and hymn book to a park and enjoy some quiet time. Now that my children are adults I still

Most time is wasted, not in hours, but in minutes. A bucket with a small hole in the bottom gets as empty as a bucket that is deliberately kicked over.
Paul J. Meyer

hour. We also discuss future family nights, dates and vacations. When our children were younger, every Friday night was family night. It is also important for us to have times away just as a couple. During these times we try not to talk "ministry" but just have fun and enjoy each other. For me it seems easier to live with a busy schedule if I know a break is coming.

Write it Down – There are a few practical tips I have received from oth-

have my favorite parking place in a beautiful park that I retreat to regularly. I find this refreshing in the midst of a busy life. It is well worth the effort and time.

These are just a few tips. If life seems crazy and there is not enough time to do everything, consider making a few changes. God bless you as you as you serve together with your husband. 

Editor's Note

Please pray for Ruth Rodger who has faithfully served Elders' ShopNotes as our editorial assistant. By the time you receive this issue she will have had her 2nd surgery for breast cancer (the first being 18 years ago). Ruth has served the Lord for many years, most of that with her husband Harvey who was called home to the Lord a few years ago. Ruth has raised two of her grandsons. She is a faithful encourager and co-worker in the service of our Lord. If any would like to write a note of encouragement, her address is: 445 Stearns Rd., Churchville, NY 14428.

From the Q-Files

"For of those to whom much is given, much is required. And when at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each of us, recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to the state, our success or failure, in whatever office we hold, will be measured by the answer to four questions: First, were we truly men of courage ... Second, were we truly men of judgment ... Third, were we truly men of integrity .. Finally, were we truly men of dedication?" *Speech to the Massachusetts State Legislature (January 9, 1961) Robert Kennedy*

Courage: The state or quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger, fear, or vicissitudes with self-possession, confidence, and resolution; bravery. *American Heritage Dictionary*

"Courage is not simply *one* of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality. A chastity or honesty or mercy which yields to danger will be chaste or honest or merciful only on conditions. Pilate was merciful till it became risky." *C.S. Lewis, "The Screwtape Letters."* 

Questions (cont.)

spired Scripture writer.

What does this kind of false teaching look like? Paul describes it succinctly:

Obsession with raising questions.

Various translations render the idea: *morbid interest, obsession, unhealthy interest/desire, craving, infection*. The Message Bible puts it this way, those “*who infect the air with germs of envy, controversy ...*” To be sure, asking questions should be encouraged if they are genuine and innocent of malicious intent. But there is a point after which discontent and a lack of submission is evident, even if cloaked in a false humility, such as “I’m just asking.” Some people seem to thrive on asking questions without ever accepting sound answers. Others skillfully thrust and parry with well-worded questions designed to challenge the solid doctrinal base of the local church. These breed a constant discontent. Paul calls this “sick.”

Hair splitting. Literally, Paul is referring to the person who has a morbid interest in “*strife about words*” (4b). This seems to be a person who delights in nit-picking over words and meanings, using words as weapons of battle. Some people are simply good debaters and are quite forceful. All the more reason for elders to be constantly on guard.

I envision a person who is constantly playing on the nuances of the language to undermine the clear meaning of Scripture. Now, as with all false teaching, this is a subversion of a good thing—it is important to be careful of the words one uses and their meanings. For example, a Roman Catholic would agree that a person is saved by grace through faith. This sounds like solid doctrine from Scripture,

doesn’t it?—that is, until a careful analysis reveals that the RC understanding of grace is different from the biblical perspective. Namely, they would believe grace is something that a person earns through his piety and good works, whereas Scripture teaches that grace is unmerited favor (Eph 2:8-9).

So, we do need to be careful about words and their meanings. However, a false teacher constantly disputes the words of right doctrine, and does so to promote his own conceited controversies.

Pernicious consequences. False teaching has clear results and Paul lists them in a rather brusque fashion: *envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, friction* (vs. 4b-5). “By their fruit you will know them,” Jesus said. (Matt 7:20). Arguments seem to be their forte, they are good at it. However, winning arguments is not the goal. Rather, truth is. Given free reign, the false teachers are revealed to be “*men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth*” (5b). What a sad conclusion! “Depraved” means “destroyed utterly, spoiled, corrupt.” It doesn’t get any worse than this! They become completely devoid of all truth.

The irony of the matter is that false teachers “*suppose that godliness is a means of gain*” (5b). They believe their version of godliness is obviously true. The word translated “suppose” in the original language means literally “to hold by custom,” that is, they think it is completely obvious that their teaching about how to be godly will make things better (gain) for people, and that others

see it this way as well. And, isn’t it true that most people are interested in what religion can help them gain for themselves. This is pernicious, the idea that godliness should be sought for the gain it brings us. Godliness is a worthy goal in and of itself, simply because God requires it—not because of its beneficial value for oneself!

What do we do with all this? Elders need to be aware of the methods of the enemy of our souls, and to be constantly on guard. Satan is subtle, so we need to be vigilant. Error can come in many forms: some is crafty, some is understated, some is sly, some ingenious, devious or shrewd. Many with less experience in the spiritual battlegrounds may not perceive it as error. Some might say, “Why are the elders getting so uptight?” Others, “Why are you judging that person?” or “Can’t we agree to disagree?” Yes, we need to pick our battles carefully. Be that as it may, there are times when the elders need to stand guard, even when the rank and file of the church doesn’t understand the implication.

May we be like Nehemiah, who refused to give way to Sanballat and Tobiah. They wanted to hinder the work of the Lord by entering into negotiations, but Nehemiah saw through their ruse and retorted, “Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:3). There is a time for discussion and a time to take a stand and build the walls. Elders need to know when to respond to questions and when to stand firm – so that the work of building the church does not get sidetracked. My prayer is that the Lord would give us both the discernment and the strength to stand well. 

ELDERS’ SHOPNOTES

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Feedback & comments are welcomed along with suggestions for future articles.

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ...”