



Biblical Principles Comfort or Ministry?

by Chuck Gianotti

Oh, to live life a bit more comfortably! Did you know that such creaturely comfort can hinder the work of the Lord! There is nothing wrong with desiring comfort from pain and hardship. As elders, however, we cannot afford to spend too much time seeking our own comfort and affluence at the expense of influencing others to become Christ-focused.

In the last issue of ESN we saw how some people use religion (often indistinguishable on the surface from faith) as a means for personal gain, whether for self-advancement or a sense of prestige, power, material possessions or financial reward. When we consider those who preside as a singular pastor over the flock of God, we who believe in the plurality of elders can be patently self-righteous in charging them with sub-Christian attitudes and suspect motivations. Humility and courageous honesty demand that we look inward, rather than judge another Man's servant. We may be just as prone to practice our faith and our roles as elders with less than stellar motivations. Peter tells fellow elders to serve "*not for sordid gain*" (1 Peter 5:1-3 NASB). Why, in his later years, would he write that if not from having observed some tendency of elders, flawed humans that they were, to ministry from impure motives.

While monetary gain connected with being an elder simply does not exist for most, the desire for wealth can be evidenced in other areas of an elder's life. Few parts of the world have been isolated from western marketing, and the pressure to accumulate more stuff or wallow in discontent can be intense.

Going for the right kind of "gain"

Well, Paul goes on to tell Timothy that there is in fact great gain in the Christian life: "*But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment*" (1 Ti 6:6). Yet he just finished (in verse 5) saying that practicing our godliness in order to gain something for ourselves was wrong! As he often does elsewhere, Paul loves to use a play on words. In this case he points out a right kind of gain which is completely unlike the wrong kind of gain just denounced. When one pursues godliness for the right purpose, contentment is a natural by-product—and that is great gain!

One kind of gain deals with *motivation*,

the other with *results*. Personal gain as a motive is wrong, because it never satisfies. However, personal gain as a result is contentment. The longing for stuff is never satisfied; it is eclipsed by the satisfaction of life without the stuff. The longing for more money or the discontent that comes with the lack of money is symptomatic of wrong focus.

We elders, of all people, must be ruthlessly honest with ourselves. How can we know if this is true of us? Of me?

Paul invites us to look at the evidences of the kind of "godliness" a person has pursued. If our apparent godliness is genuine, then the result will be "contentment." It is actually peripheral to our motivation and goal, which is to live fully for Christ. Contentment is not the thing we have our eyes set on—contentment is simply a by-product of godliness. It is not a thing you can grasp after, it is elusive, it is the

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gain awarded only to those who seek something else, namely Christ.

**Seek God
rather than rewards**

It is true throughout Scripture that we are encouraged by the promise of rewards. However, these are never the primary motivators, but are secondary. That is why the instinctive action of the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:10 will be to cast their crowns (rewards) before the throne of the Lamb. This will be a perfectly reasonable act of worship, demonstrating that the motivation of the true believer's heart is not ultimately the rewards, but Christ. The old hymn captures it well, "The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear Bridegroom's face." Indeed, we would pity a young girl whose primary desire for getting married was to have a wedding dress!

We certainly desire the rewards and the gifts of God. In fact, we are made to enjoy them, but seeking God first is a profoundly better thing (as the Lord says in Matt 6). We don't need to worry about the rewards or gifts because we know God is gracious, giving us far more than we deserve. So being freed from the longing for the rewards and gifts of God, we serve Him with a singular heart. The result—contentment, and that is great gain!

Contentment is contrasted with a life preoccupied with always wanting more:

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into

(Continued on page 4)

The church today is in great need of true shepherds. As knowledge increases, teachers seem plentiful. As the world becomes more complex, church leaders are pressed into the role of decision makers. But where are the shepherds, the men whose first love is to care for God's sheep? Scripture is clear that the world is a dangerous place, that people are like sheep, and that sheep easily go astray. Shepherds seem in short supply.

Many churches hire a man, paying him to be their "shepherd"—but often he is really just the chief administrator of the church that hired him. How is the need for shepherds to be met in an assembly that seeks to follow the New Testament teaching on church leadership? Where can one find genuine shepherds, with a heart like the Lord Jesus Himself?

God's Provision

First, shepherds should ideally come from within the fellowship and preparation is largely a matter of the heart. God works in ordinary believers to develop the heart of a shepherd, and these He gives to the church as elders and servants. Equipping through school or mentoring with an older brother can certainly have a part, but these are no substitute for the hidden work being wrought in the secret places of the heart over time, produced by the Spirit of God through life's trials and problems as one attempts to love and care for people.

What encouragement can we give to younger men who sense a growing desire to share in this great work? Probably the most helpful suggestion would be to consider the shepherd heart and ministry of the Lord Jesus Himself. He invites: "Come unto me... Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart...." (Matt. 11:28-30 KJV). What a privilege to take His yoke, and be taught by Him!

It has often been pointed out that there are three beautiful shepherd titles given to the Lord Jesus in the New Testament: the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and the Chief Shepherd. Meditating on these passages will provide helpful lessons for those who desire the Lord to produce within them the heart of a shepherd.

The Good Shepherd

John records the words of the Lord Jesus concerning the Good Shepherd in John 10: He is the One who is prepared to die for the sheep. The contrasting idea is a

bad or evil shepherd--evidently, this refers to the heart motive of a bad shepherd whose first concern is for his own gain and personal safety.

Recently I heard of a group that fired their shepherd. Sad that they had only one, sad that he was hired and then fired but such was their report. He became angry and vindictive at the loss of his position and salary. Yet he might have said, "You can do as you see fit, but I must take care of the sheep and God will take care of me." Understandably, his reaction raised suspicions of a "hireling" among the people.

So a good shepherd has a right motive: doing the will of the Owner of the flock, and willing to sacrifice for the sheep as needed. This is very practical. It challenges us to make a continual "heart checkup" on why we do what we do. Long nights, difficult visits or meetings, laboring in the Word and doctrine are not always appreciated by people. But the Lord sees the heart, and blesses His servant over time. Remember that the hireling does get the job done for awhile, too. But in time of crisis, he flees. He has the wrong motive, and this will never produce the shepherd heart.

The Great Shepherd

The writer of Hebrews speaks of the Great Shepherd in Hebrews 13:20-21. This is the Lord Jesus risen from the dead and living to perfect His people. The keyword throughout Hebrews is "better" or "greater." Again, the contrasting idea is lesser and inferior.

Immediately a question arises: Who receives the credit, the praise for all that is accomplished in caring for the flock? Even though there is much weakness and God's servants are "compassed with infirmity," He is pleased to work through them to accomplish His will, and promises that His strength is being perfected in our weakness (II Cor. 12:9).

Here then is a second motive check for shepherds: who is the "Great One" in the thinking of the sheep? Is it the Lord, the Great Shepherd or is it a gifted brother? As we spend time with the Lord, being honest with Him about our weaknesses and failings, and as we see Him bless our labors, we are constantly reminded to "praise the Lord for His wonderful works to the children of men" as often stated in the Psalms.

The Chief Shepherd

Peter refers to the Chief Shepherd in I Peter 5:4. Since this passage is addressed directly to elders, it deserves special emphasis. It refers to a coming day when the Chief or Head Shepherd – the Lord Jesus Himself – rewards His servants. One of the qualities of their labor is described by Peter in the passage. They must refrain from being "lords over God's heritage," i.e. His flock. That is, they do not compete with the Lord for power and authority. His word is kept clearly in mind: "...one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." (Matt 23.8).

Thus all those who would care for God's people must rise above the natural inclination for greed and power. Repeatedly, the Lord had warned about this: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you....whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:27).

Even though the expression "under-shepherd" is not found in the Bible, it is a good reminder that true shepherds are not dictators or unaccountable men, but labor under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, and would never want it otherwise. Recently I heard of a man who told his fellow elders: "We are elders; we can do whatever we want in the church." Wrong! The authority of elders is upheld by the Lord only as they promote and defend His Word and truly shepherd His people.

So here is a third important motive check for shepherds: What are my real thoughts about power and authority among the people of God? Do I desire to control people, or do I sincerely want Him to be "Lord over all?"

Conclusion

Shepherd work is not a profession that one takes up. It is a way of life that springs from deep within. It is really a love response to the Master who once said, "Lovest thou me? Feed (shepherd) my sheep"(John 21:16). Often the development of a shepherd's heart will require many years of hard work and trying experiences. But keeping a close watch on the motives of the heart to be sure that we are seeking His glory and the eternal benefit of His people will go far in keeping us on the right pathway.

Meeting/Ministry?

As it happened, the elders decided to occasionally invite ministry leaders to our elders' meetings. The first fifteen minutes we broke into groups of four or five to discuss three questions:

What has your week been like?

How can we pray for you?

What is one area of your ministry we can pray for?


A person in one of the groups shared last: "Well, this week's been like all my others. You know my wife is dying of cancer." (We knew nothing of the sort!)

"I get home from work and cook the meals. I put the kids and Irene to bed, and it's midnight. Then I drop into bed to do it all again seven hours later. As for ministry, I just can't seem to get anything accomplished. Taking care of Irene takes every bit of energy I have. I wish you would pray for me."


At that point all our ill feelings toward this man dissolved. Instead of being irritated, we were devastated. Not one of us had prayed for him during these months. We criticized him. We gossiped about him and wondered why he didn't get off the dime.

"Why didn't you tell us sooner," I asked.

"Somehow it never seemed appropriate," he said. "What was I to do, interrupt a discussion of the music director's ideas to say, 'By the way, things are bad at home'? Besides, I was afraid I might cry."

I resolved at that point never again to let committee business squeeze out the community that is essential to being the church. It doesn't matter what problem or project we're working on: prior to being performers, we're people who have to care for each other. And that makes us work together even more effectively. (source unknown) 

Editor's Note

Prayer Update: Thank you for your prayers for Ruth Rodger (our faithful ESN editorial assistant). She has been recovering well and praises the Lord for His faithfulness. Continue to pray also for Jack & Ruth Spender, who both suffer with Lyme Disease. Continue to remember them in the loss of their daughter Bethany. 

Are You Leading A Hazardous Life?

By Jeff Miller

10 QUESTIONS (True or False)


1. I have a male role model who has modeled for me how to accept responsibility for my failures.
2. I meet regularly with a man who challenges me in my faith by asking me hard questions about my relationship with God.
3. I am able to wait patiently for other people without growing frustrated.
4. I prioritize people over projects and don't run people over or ask loved ones to wait for me while trying to complete a task.
5. I am influencing people more in eternal ways than in earthly ways.
6. I have my lust under control and I'm not addicted to pornography.

7. When I talk to people, I consciously strive to say the right words in the right way at the right time.

8. (If married) My wife does not complain that I work or travel too much.

9. I manage my anger rather than lose my temper or misdirect it toward the wrong people.

10. I live consistent whether in private or in public.

Excerpted from *Hazards of Being a Man* (Baker Books, 2007) which is designed to diagnose your weaknesses and provide practical steps to overcome them. *Hazards* dedicates an entire chapter to helping you find victory for any statement that you honestly answered with a "False". 

Come, Thou Font

by Harry Adams

Recently my wife, daughter and I were reading Psalm 37. When we came to the fourth verse—"Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of your heart"—I asked if this was true for me.

I am crippled by Lou Gherig's disease, ALS, which is a progressive and fatal neurological illness. In the eight years I've had ALS, it's taken my voice and robbed me of the use of my limbs. It also forced us out of our lovely home.

Is the promise of fulfilled desires true for me and for the millions of other believers who have had their plans and dreams shattered?

Yes, it's true—exceedingly so.


- I desire a healthy body, and He promises me a body that is powerful, incorruptible, glorious and spiritual.
- I desire a home that is beautiful and spacious, and He is preparing such a home for me in a city whose builder is God.
- I desire a world without crime, lies, or violence, and He promises me a world where righteousness dwells.
- I desire to be with those I love, and He promises that I will be caught up together with them forever.
- I desire an end to my sorrow, and He promises me fullness of joy in His presence.

• I desire a heart so filled with love that there is no room for sin, and He promises to make me like Jesus when I am in heaven.

• I desire a ministry, and He promises I will serve Him eternally.

• I desire a voice with which to praise Him, and He promises I will sing before His throne.

• Most of all, I desire to see Him, and He promises I will always behold His face.

He will keep His promise to give me the desires of my heart. *Used by permission.* Kindred Spirit, *A Ministry of Dallas Theological Seminary.* 

From the Q-Files

From the mouths of ... Comic Figures?

In the movie, *Batman Begins*, Batman (alias Bruce Wayne) asks his faithful butler why he cares so much for him. The butler, reflecting back on Wayne's deceased father responds, "Because a good man once made me responsible...for what was most precious to him...in the whole world." As elders why do we care? Is it not that the Perfect God-Man has entrusted us with something that is most precious to Him in the whole world?

As related by Matt Cramer

Questions (cont.)

ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

(1 Tim 6:9-10)

Compare this to verse 7, which points out that we come into this world absolutely broke, owning nothing, and we leave the same way. Those who have a wrong concept of godliness are constantly stressed by reaching, striving for that which will not last past the grave. Their focus is on what they do not have, living their lives for more. True contentment, on the other hand, comes when we are satisfied with just the basic necessities of life (vs. 8). Things are nice to have, but we dare not let them drive us or pre-occupy us as elders.

Our concept of ownership is short lived, though, confined to the fleeting years we live on this planet earth. To spend our brief time in constant discontentment, searching, reaching for what we do not have materially or financially is the height of folly. We are simply stewards of God's possessions, not ours. Followers of Jesus Christ learn to be content with food and clothing, Paul's euphemism for the basic necessities.

The temptation of wealth and materialism is probably stronger today than it was in Timothy's time. We need to listen as Paul tells him to instruct those who have an abundance of this world's possessions:

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Tim 6:17).

Courage and humility

Notice, he doesn't command rich people to give their stuff away, nor does he pressure them into giving their money to the church. Rather, Timothy is encouraged to redirect the focus of the rich—for God still is the one who supplies our needs. If we are but stewards of God's possessions, then we should focus on God, not on the possessions. That is our hope. We don't trust our financial or material resources but we trust in Him who is the Supplier of our needs. We dare not confuse the gifts with the Giver. Just as the Macedonians modeled for us, all Christians should give themselves first to God, then consider what to do with their resources (2 Cor 8:5).

Paul then moves on to instructing the wealthy to "do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share..." (1 Ti 6:18). Such is sufficient for contented, Christ-focused people pursuing genuine godliness.

Finally, we come back to the real gain of living a genuine godly life:

"... storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed." (1 Ti 6:19)

Our Lord put it this way, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35). His blessings are foundational to our experiencing life the way God has intended it.

What do we long for?


We elders are not immune to the pull of materialism. Wealth can be a temptation and a snare. Notice the earlier verse:

"For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for

it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (1 Tim 6:10)

It is not the having of money that is the problem, but the "longing" for it that causes the problem. One translation puts it as being "fond" of money. Extra comforts of life are good to enjoy, but when we are constantly reaching out to gain or retain them, then our focus gets off target. Literally, the word "long for" in verse 10, means "to reach out to." The idea is that the money, or having enough of it, is just beyond reach, so the person keeps reaching. Their life is characterized by their reach. This is contrasted with Paul's attitude, "*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Phil 3:14).

We, as elders, must be our own harshest critics. We cannot teach that which we have not honestly examined in our own lives. I cannot imagine Timothy thinking, "Come on, Paul, you don't think I would be tempted with something like that, do you?" Yet Paul admonishes him none-the-less to "... flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness" (1 Ti 6:11). In Acts 20:28 Paul warns the Ephesian elders, "Be on guard for yourselves" *before* he says, "and for all the flock." We bury our heads in the sand if we don't think we can be tempted. How much better to pray as David:

S"earch me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way." (Ps 139:23) 

ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

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"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ..."