



Biblical Foundations Finishing Well

by Chuck Gianotti

Studies in 2 Timothy—Part 7 (4:9-22 NASB)

Are you on track to finish well. It may seem a bit premature for younger men, but a grim reality of Christian ministry is the very large number of men who are unable to finish well. Many give up spiritually well before their bodies give up physically. Lance Witt, in his book "Replenish: Leading From A Healthy Soul," writes, "1,500 pastors leave the ministry permanently each month in America." That is alarming!

Witt was speaking about traditional pastors. What about elders? I don't know the number who burn out, but how many do you know who were once walking well, faithfully serving the Lord with enthusiasm, but now have faded out, burned-out or otherwise gone into neutral, no longer making any sort of impact for the Lord? Oh, they may still "sit" with the elders, even hanging on long past their "effectiveness date," but their spiritual leadership has clearly been abandoned.

In reading the final section of Paul's second letter to Timothy, the reality of ministry failure was not unknown to the one who disciplined and mentored many faithful young men. You can almost hear Paul's sigh. But, ever strong to the very end, his enthusiasm for those continuing on faithfully in their service is quite evident.

Some Examples

One such "doing well" individual was Timothy. The older Paul writes to help shore up this younger fellow-servant. But now is the time when Paul needs help from Timothy: "Make every effort to come to me soon" (vs. 9). We don't know the exact urgency, but the weather might have had something to do with it, based on his request to come before winter (vs. 13). He needed his cloak and an update of his library. At his advanced age, he well knew that the precious time he had left on earth must be economized.

In fact, he gives the presenting reason for the urgency, the dispersion of all but a few of his team of longtime co-workers. "... for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (vs. 10a). What a sad commentary, succinct and without elaboration or justification—Demas had simply abandoned serving the Lord altogether. "Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia" (vs. 10b). There is no implication that Crescens and Titus, however, are being painted with same brush as Demas. Titus for remained faithful in ministry but he had relocat-

ed to the Adriatic Sea region from Italy. In fact, the needs of those in Crete required Titus to stay on there for a while to build up the churches there. This came about at Paul's bidding (Titus 1:5), which demonstrates Paul's greater concern for the well-being of the church in Crete than for his own need of co-workers to be with him. Crescens is mentioned in Scripture only here, so we know little about him, but apparently the apostle missed his fellowship in the work as well. The point is that Paul felt a need for help. Have you ever felt like that?

"Only Luke is with me" (vs. 11a). A frequent traveling companion to Paul and author of the third Gospel account, Luke remained with him to the end of the historical record

Going on and finishing well can only happen if we take our strength from the Lord.

(see the use of the first person plural pronoun by the author of Acts 28:14). "Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me

for service." (vs. 11b). He who was once shelved for ministry, at least in Paul's eyes, had found restoration to usefulness, interestingly, again, in Paul's eyes. The mentorship of Barnabas had apparently paid off (see Acts 15:39), and the story gives hope to all of us who have failed at times.

"But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus" (vs. 12). Paul was like a general sending out his lieutenants in the grand, well-coordinated march of the Kingdom of God into the world. He had trained them all and they were now deployed throughout the western Mediterranean. But, as each one left, Paul felt his own needs deeply.

The Cloak and Library

Finally, he gives instructions to Timothy: "When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments" (vs. 13). From such often passed-over verses in our Bibles we can piece together much of the logistical movement of resources and personnel in the apostolic ministry. Paul needed his study materials. We can only guess the circumstances resulting in Paul's separation from his library and why he needed it at this juncture. Wouldn't it be fascinating to know the volumes on his reading list? At the time of writing, the codex form of writing (similar to our present day book binding) was becoming common, which made for transportation of books less cumbersome than scrolls, hence Paul's rather casual request. We would be remiss if we didn't suggest that every elder, like Paul, should build a good library

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Leadership Principles

How are Elders Recognized?

by Jack Spender

In previous articles, we have seen that church elders are the result of a cooperative work between God and His people. Elders are “made” by the Holy Spirit, they have a desire to serve, they exhibit certain qualities, and they become a known group within the church. But how do they become known?

In this article we want to zero in on one very specific aspect of the “human responsibility” side; recognizing elders. Since no Scripture provides a formula or official ceremony by which elders are added to a “board,” we will need to gather the clues that can help us understand the process.

Gathering the Clues

In the first place, it is significant that there are no biblical instructions for electing or “installing” church elders. Normally, arguments from silence are not compelling, but the very fact that two extensive lists of qualifications (or character qualities) for elders are preserved (I Tim. 3, Titus 1) but no details of how to make things official seems an eloquent silence. Unless, of course, the intent is a quiet, spiritual process that emphasizes a growing discernment of what God has been doing all along!

Second, we read that Paul, in writing to the young church at Thessalonica, exhorts the believers to “recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you” (I Thess. 5:12 NKJV). Such an instruction would be meaningless if men became elders by official public action such as majority vote or by belonging to the ruling family. The language used reminds us of the Lord’s words to Moses when, needing assistants, Moses was told to gather men “whom you know to be the elders of the people...” (Num 11:16).

Another important clue comes from the actions of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:23 where we read that they “appointed elders in every church.” It is easy to read modern day politics into the word “appoint.” Space forbids a detailed study of the various Greek words for appointing people, but the particular word used here is a combination of two words “to lift” and “hand,” i.e., “to lift the hand.” Based on this, some have suggested that the reference is to a vote being taken in the congregation by the raising of hands.

However, it is important to note that in the original text of Acts 14:23, the subjects doing the action are clearly Paul and Barnabas. A more literal rendering of the Greek would be, “And having appointed **for them** in every church elders....” William Hoste, in his book “Bishops, Priests and Deacons,” remarks that, “There is indeed something grotesque in the idea of Paul and Barnabas ‘electing by a show of hands.’” More likely, the meaning would be captured by our common expression “pointing out” those who were suitable.

A study of the context shows that this action by the apostles did not take

ed, Paul waited until a return visit to the young churches in Galatia before appointing or pointing out elders. If the process was simply an arbitrary “official action,” he might have taken care of the matter while still with the Thessalonians, but instead he sends them an exhortation to exercise discernment (1 Thess 5:12).

The same may be said of the note to Titus mentioned earlier. Paul might simply have appointed elders while he was at Crete, but instead, he leaves Titus there and later reminds him of the connection between church order and good leadership.

2). How important is it to determine the nuances of words like “appoint,” “know,” recognize? Far from splitting hairs, it will be seen at once that the underlying issue is the ultimate source of elders’ authority - God or men?

3) While chosen persons such as “the

People need to know who is in charge, and there are few areas where clear communication is more important.

place when the assemblies throughout the region were first planted, but on a later, return visit through the area (Acts 14:21). This would allow time for capable men to exhibit some of the qualities necessary and apply themselves to the care and feeding of the flock. Understandably, men like Paul and Barnabas who were older in the faith and more experienced in the work of God would discern those who should be considered elders, and it would be a great benefit to a young church to have help in the recognition of elders before the “missionaries” left the area.

The fact that Paul reminds Titus, a young man laboring on the island of Crete to do the same, i.e. to appoint elders “in every city” (Titus 1:5) shows that this role was not limited to original apostles.

In view of all this, we ought not to read something highly structured and official into the word “appoint,” but rather something less formal—a discernment which would be not only shared through pointing out, but accepted and honored.

Supporting Observations

Before moving on to consider the public aspect of elder recognition, a couple of related observations may be helpful.

1) It is interesting to note that no Christian worker in the NT ever appointed elders on a first visit. As already not-

twelve” (apostles) or the seven chosen in Acts 6 to serve tables are clearly identified, there is nevertheless considerable emphasis placed on testimony and reputation. Expressions such as Paul’s description of James, Cephas and John, who “seemed to be pillars,” and the corresponding discernment of the apostles who “perceived the grace” given to Paul (Gal 2:9), underscore the importance of spiritual discernment of God’s workings among men.

Thus, all that we have seen lends support to the idea of godly men recognizing and responding to a divine work rather than a sort of power play engineered by influential men to make official the will of the people.

Making Things Public

Throughout church history, various groups have tried to follow the idea of an “unrecognized, spiritual leadership.” These efforts for the most part have not gone well. People need to know who is in charge, and there are few areas where clear communication is more important.

Since Scripture does not specify any “ordination” procedures, it seems reasonable to assume that the church must have liberty to handle the matter as best meets the need, without impugning on any biblical principles. In a new church, older and experienced believers may help both in the recognition process and in public announcement. Obviously, once an initial

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Wives' Corner

Settings of Silver

by Mary Gianotti

"Like apples of gold in settings of silver, so is a word skillfully spoken" (Proverbs 25:11 NET)

King Solomon wrote this proverb thousands of years ago and it was preserved by the scribes of King Hezekiah. These beautiful words are full of meaning for women today. An elder's role often makes his wife more aware of difficulties and challenges in the church than most women. Unless we take this verse to heart we can be hurtful and destructive in our response to the people who desperately need love and understanding.

The setting for our words is described as silver. This precious metal is both ductile and malleable. It can be stretched into a thin wire but must undergo what is called tensile stress. When compressive stress is applied by hammering and rolling, silver emerges as a thin

sheet. Both processes require high temperature and tremendous pressure.

Character is often formed by our reaction to the stresses in our life. From the smallest irritation to the heaviest of burdens, God is using each trial to refine us, with the goal that He will use us for His glory. How do we respond to the

beautiful, fragrant and sweet. A lovely description of how our words should be.

King Solomon must have given much thought to this topic, for the book of Proverbs is full of instruction on how we should communicate. For example, "The truly wise person restrains his words" (17:27) and, "The words of a person's mouth are like deep waters and a fountain of wisdom is like a flowing brook" (18:24).

Time and attention must be given to the setting of fine jewelry,

providing a place for the gem to reflect its true beauty. The words we speak reflect what God is doing in our lives and can bring peace, healing, encouragement and comfort to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let us strive to be those rare and beautiful creations of God's handiwork, not the cheap imitation.



Character is often formed by our reaction to the stresses in our life.

pressure God applies to our lives? Complaining, whining and bitterness will not produce a setting of silver for our words. When we give attention to God's truths and act in obedience, our lives become the backdrop for what we say.

The fruit in the proverb represents our words. Some scholars believe the fruit referred to is the apricot as the climate in Palestine is not conducive for growing apples. At any rate, the fruit is

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group or board of elders has been formed, adding others will simply mean repeating the process.

Preliminary announcements of tentative candidates can give the people time to ask questions, share viewpoints or register concerns. Simple interviews, question and answer times or open discussions can be very helpful. All of these can be kept simple if we remember that the normal NT pattern is not introducing the saints to strangers who are being imported from other areas to serve in the church. Rather, it is a recounting of what

has become increasingly obvious; beloved brothers have been laboring among the flock, and are now being publically accepted by all as having been raised up by the Lord.

It will be helpful if public announcements are timely and clear, and use the word "recognize" as a synonym for spiritual discernment rather than official ordination marking the commencement of spiritual authority. It is true that one of the definitions for the word "recognize" is "to approve formally," but the public aspect is best seen as the natural and in-

evitable fruit of the greater work that has preceded it.

The amount of weight any church places on God's workings to supply leadership as compared to its own response in discernment, recognition and public communications will probably vary from one church to another. But the safest route may be to apply the general principle: "So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Rom 9:16).



Guard Yourself

by Chuck Gianotti

"Being a servant is not a path to the top," said Bob Deffenbaugh at a conference recently, "It is the top." As elders we must be careful to guard ourselves against allowing our inestimable privilege of servant the Lord and His people to produce a sense of entitlement and arrogance in our hearts. What can begin as humble service, runs the danger of ending in a form of clericalism demanding obedience to ourselves, rather than to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When author Fyodor Dostoyevsky penned his classic work, "The Brothers Karamosov," he referred to the Russian monastic "Elder" to whom a novitiate yielded complete "submission, complete self-abnegation". Although using the word "elder" differently than in Scripture, Dostoyevsky insightfully writes: "It is true, perhaps, that this instrument (i.e. monastic elders) which had stood the test of a thousand years for the moral regeneration of a man from slavery to freedom and to moral perfectibility may be a two-

edged weapon and it may lead some not to humility and complete self-control but to the most Satanic pride, that is, to bondage and not to freedom."

Likewise, elders who are to model humility and self-control need to guard against any form of eldership that nurtures legalistic adherence to their own traditions, however couched in biblical terminology, rather than freedom in Christ that new life gives.



Finishing Well *(cont. from page 1)*

of resources to aid in the study and application of the Word of God.

Facing Opposition

“Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching” (vss 14-15). Paul was ever warning about false teachers and their incessant ways. How much more does the man of God need to stand firm against repeated affronts to the church? One of the most important roles for leaders in the church is to “guard the flock of God” (Acts 20:28).

“At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (vs. 16-19). The apostle Paul knew resistance—sometimes even standing alone in the spiritual battle! That is a collateral aspect of ministry—if you are serving the Lord, the enemy will oppose you with discouragements of all kinds. One of the greatest discouragements for a leader is loneliness of ministry. Often the leader of God feels abandoned, unsupported, neglected or marginalized. In the face of such pitfalls, going on and finishing well can only happen if we take our strength from the Lord. Paul knew this strength, despite his weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

Finally, the apostle passes on greet-

ings to his dear friends from Ephesus, Prisca and Aquila (vs. 19, see Acts 18) and the church meeting at the home of Onesiphorus. Others that had been with him, but are now elsewhere include Erastus and Trophimus (vs. 20), who had also been his sometime traveling companions.

Final Greetings

Then, finally, he extends greetings on behalf of the Christians from where he is writing. Four named individuals along with the others referred to collectively as “the brethren” are listed, in contrast to the ones listed before who had been his traveling companions. He always encouraged communication and fellowship between the various churches as can be seen in his frequent messages of greetings.

Some were finishing well, like the apostle Paul, Luke, Timothy, Titus and even Mark. There is one more—I would like to close this brief study of 2 Timothy with one disciple, not mentioned in Scripture, coming some 2000 years later. He is a man, 86 years of age and he is finishing well. From the time he was a young man, he dedicated himself to serving the Lord with all his energy. He worked his way up in a manufacturing plant to the position of general foreman, where he retired after some 35 years of secular work. But, more importantly, he was an elder in his local church, and he loved the believers. He was raised up into shepherding God’s people while in his late 20’s, and served for close to 60 years, most of that time, while working a secular job. Upon retirement, he simply upshifted to a higher gear and gave more

time in service to the Lord and His people, including taking countless missions trips, visiting nursing homes and organizing conferences. While others were spending their later years in ease, he was tirelessly visiting the sick, counseling the down trodden, leading the flock and teaching the Word. In fact, one of his last significant efforts was discipling two young boys who showed interest in growing spiritually. Get this, an 80+ year old man meeting weekly with two 12-year old boys for the study of the Word. That, my friends, is finishing well!

Now, his memory is fading and carrying on a conversation is difficult, or remembering what happened this morning or what day of the week it is. He spends copious amounts of time simply walking or sitting in his chair. But, he is still thinking about the Lord, reading his Bible and praying—and he loves being with the Lord’s people. While his ability to make the routine decisions of spiritual leadership is ebbing, prayer comes easily for him. His heart remains turned toward the Lord. I know this man well, he is my father-in-law, Ross McIntee. And he is my present day example of faithful service as an elder of God’s people.

Do you want to finish well? It can happen when a life is dedicated wholeheartedly to the Master, living well at every stage of life and ministry, never giving up, never abandoning the work God has called you to do at whatever stage of life you are at.

“The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you” (vs. 22).



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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.

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