



Editor's Note

Greetings to all our friends in this New Year, which brings with it new challenges and new opportunities to enjoy God's grace in our lives. Chuck Gianotti, our longstanding editor has moved on to other fields of service, and we thank him and Mary for the years of faithful work for us all. In looking over some previous issues (Nov. 2012), I found this quote from Chuck: "I believe building a strong, biblically qualified and functioning eldership in the local church may be the single most important influence challenging all men at all levels to rise up and take responsibility in the church and in the home." Pretty much sums up our mission!

So with God's help, we press on, continuing the same format and goals with the

opportunity to welcome some new writers bringing perspectives we can all learn from. Thankfully, the staff of dedicated servants who do the work behind the scenes of putting issues together and sending them out, is pleased to continue. In time, we'll complete the transfer of contact and new subscriber information, but for now you can reach me at alan7s@yahoo.com, or by phone: 203-393-0078. Heartfelt thanks to all who pray for this ministry, especially for the details that go with any change. We thank the Lord for His faithfulness through the years.

Jack Spender

Leadership Principles

Trusting in the Premises of God

by Colin Anderson

Is there a place for "logical thinking" in the life of maturing believers? Do we sometimes imply that God is only pleased with "blind faith?" Isn't there a place for "thinking it through" in the Christian life? Ponder the following article by Colin Anderson. It may help enrich the ministry of the Word in your assembly.

Trusting in the Premises of God

No, that is not a misspelling, still less is there any reference in our title to the "many dwelling places" in heaven. There are promises given in Scripture, so plain that only unbelief can cause us to miss the benefit of them. For example, in Old Testament times God showed His care for Abraham, the "father" of those who believe, by condescending to put Himself under oath. Heb.6: 17,18 reads: "Thus God determined to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us." (Christ was similarly gracious when speaking of that which He knew His hearers would find hard to believe by saying, "Truly, truly I say to you...")

But there are times when mature faith is encouraged to think and act in the light of its knowledge of God's character as revealed in Scripture when it has no specific promise on which to rely, a faith

which enables those who possess it to be at peace when others panic. Or it may inspire a courage that urges a believer to undertake a project that he believes will please the Lord even though others do not share his/her vision and there may not even be an example of a person doing exactly that thing in Scripture. Examples of relying on a premise will follow.

The Value of a Premise

Your dictionary will give several definitions of a premise, one of which will show that when we are thinking logically we may use a premise to arrive at a conclusion as to what another person is likely to say or do. We think of their past words or actions as having given us an insight as to their nature, customary behavior and/or their attitude toward us. We build on that premise. We dare not speculate how God will act, but premises can reassure those who are fearful. An illustration of this is found in Judges 13: 15-23.

The Angel of the Lord had visited Manoah's home in human form in order to confirm a prediction that his wife would bear a son. He gave them both instructions concerning the way the child was to be raised. Manoah, not knowing his visitor's true identity, invited him to stay for a meal. The visitor declined, but said a burnt offering to God would be appropriate. In the flame rising from the altar the Angel, whose name was "Wonderful", made his

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The Selection of Deacons

We have been thinking about leadership in the book of Acts. The first article was devoted mostly to introductory material and a brief look at chapters 1 - 7 (see Outline; Section I). The apostles who had been instrumental in the beginning of the young church in Jerusalem were necessarily the original leaders. We saw that they were not jealous about this task of leading, but readily delegated responsibility as the work grew. This is seen in the selection of the first deacons in chapter 6.

In the providence of God, deacons and not elders were the first permanent office bearers in the early church. This is probably because the apostles were already providing spiritual leadership, and temporal needs arose. Interestingly, it sometimes happens in practice today in newly planted churches that temporal needs cry out for administrative leadership early on, and deacons may be in place before formal recognition of elders.

In any case, Acts 6 shines with leadership principles, and we would do well to take some time to note them before proceeding. As always, we must keep in mind that there is an historical side to the record so details of application might be very different today. But timeless principles should be valuable in any age or culture.

An Overview

On the surface, it seems clear that when growth in the church threatened to distract the apostles from their primary work of laboring in the Word and prayer, assistants were chosen to care for the temporal needs of the people. Simple enough.

In context, the historian Luke has skillfully followed up his account of the explosive growth of the young work in Jerusalem (Acts 2 - 4) by recording examples of the two major threats the church always faces: those from inside, and those from outside. From within, chapters 5 and 6 document the greed and deception of Ananias and Sapphira, and the grumbling of widows being cared for by the church. In chapter 7, persecution breaks out beginning with the martyrdom of Steven, one of the seven origi-

nal deacons.

In the face of persecution, the recourse seems to be, wait, pray, and remain faithful. We read of no attempt at retaliation or political involvement. But when troubled by those from within the church, intervention is swift and decisive.

Observations and Applications from Acts 6

With regard to the selection of deacons in Acts 6, note the following:

1. There is often a definite link between growth and problems. (see Prov. 14:4) One of the best ways to serve people is to listen to them.
2. The apostles did not deny the problem; rather, they initiated a plan to solve it. They did not ask the people, "Well, what do you want to do?" As good leaders, they went back to priorities. In any age, temporal problems can distract powerfully from spiritual responsibilities.

3. A study in authority: the people choose, the apostles appoint

Note the 3 basic qualifications:

- honest report - public reputation
- filled with the Spirit - relationship with God
- men of wisdom - personal experience and integrity

Delegation involves trust: the apostles did not second guess the process used by the people to make their selection of the seven.

4. Appointing for service implies providing authority to serve. This was displayed both by prayer (dependence on God) and the laying on of hands, (accepting human responsibility)

5. Very often, the effect of good leadership is growth in the work. This is seen in:

- the spread of the Word
- new converts
- enemies affected (priests obedient to the faith)

Some new leaders quickly stand out: Stephen ch. 7; Phillip ch. 8
The devil opposes progress in the

Lord's work ch. 7

The Value of This Account

Sometimes it helps to stand back and contemplate what certain events mean in history. Think of what might have happened if the apostles had not been Spirit-filled men and good leaders.

Suppose they had tried to control all aspects of the work. The quality of their own time in the Word and prayer would certainly have suffered. Before long, the effect would be seen in a decline in the spiritual food for the flock, and then in the size and health of the flock.

Or, the apostles might have formed a committee to investigate and discipline any widows who were complaining in the church. The spirit would soon shift from the joy of grace to the fear of man which brings a snare.

Or, a split might have occurred in which the "Feed the Widows" sect withdrew from the "Limit the Widows" branch, each with their own supportive apostles.

Of course it is silly to imagine such things, but are they much different from some of the things that have happened in the history of the church? These things are written for our learning, and wise men will value the lessons they provide.

Applying the Lessons

Elders should never view the problems people bring with them as irritations but rather see in them opportunities for God to display His handiwork. People take note when a blind man now sees, and this is also true in the spiritual realm. The thinking is: "If their God can help or restore such a person, maybe there's hope for me."

One of the hardest lessons of all is for those who lead to share authority, that is, to give part of it away. Moses displayed a meek spirit when Joshua told him to forbid the two men who were prophesying in the camp. "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:29). If the raising up of new leaders does not keep pace with the growth of the work, a group can become stagnant and in-

Studies in Acts—part 2 (continued from page 2)

grown.

And then there is the temptation to choose leaders who have impressive qualifications in the business world but not in the kingdom of God. The wording may vary, but men who are blameless before their neighbors, yielded in heart to the Lord, and personally qualified are the best choice to serve the sheep.

Once new workers have been drawn into the work, how will they be supported? This is not so much a ques-

tion of finances, but of spiritual and practical fellowship at every level. It is useless to debate whether the worker is God's responsibility or man's. Without question he is both. We commend the servant or the missionary to the Lord in prayer, but we also feel our own responsibility to pray, give, encourage and communicate.

How did things work out in the end? The widows were cared for, new leaders were given involvement, the church continued to grow, all of this

stirred the enemy to action, the resulting persecution resulted in to the spread of the gospel which in turn led to the formation of many new Christian churches.

The ways of the Lord are past finding out (in advance), but we are glad when we have a record of them by hindsight!



Trusting in the Premises of God (continued from page 1)

exit. Manoah then believed he had been in the presence of Deity. He was filled with fear and said, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" His wife calmed him, reasoning from a recent premise. It assured her that, "If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering...shown us all these things...told us such things as these at this time."

Using a similar method, the Lord Jesus sought to teach His disciples (and us) not to be fretting over tomorrow's need for clothing or food. The premise for the former was to "consider the lilies of the field" that were more gloriously clad than Solomon with all his resources. The premise for the latter was the way God provided for the birds of the air. The priority of His followers was to seek "the kingdom of God and His righteousness" and their needs would be adequately supplied.

A Famous Example

George Mueller thought that only a few Christian people in his day seemed to be trusting God to look after them when they were in dire financial or material need. This was in spite of the fact that they appeared to be seeking first the kingdom of God. But they were given to worrying about where the next meal would come from or how they would clothe themselves and their families. They needed a living demonstration that God was true to His revealed character; His word could be trusted.

One day Mueller read the statement that God was "a father to the

fatherless" (Ps. 68:5). He decided to build a small orphanage and let people see God provide for the daily needs of those in his/His care. He thought it necessary to avoid pleading for support but he would provide interested friends with a journal recording how his plan had worked out on a daily basis. The first orphanage became several and Mueller's faith became an inspiration to many to work for the Lord at home and overseas without a guaranteed salary or pledges of support.

We dare not speculate how God will act, but premises can reassure those who are fearful.

My point is: Psalm 68:5 is not a promise but a premise which encouraged Mueller to believe God would provide if he acted in His name, for His glory and the strengthening of the faith of God's people. He knew God.

A Personal Experience [from brother Anderson's personal experience]

The small ocean liner arrived at the east coast of Africa and I found myself gazing over the ship's guardrails at the bustling port of Mombasa. There was no one to welcome my wife and me with our three little boys, the eldest in Grade 2. There would be no one to help us through customs, show us where we could safely eat or sleep, etc. Perhaps others were also feeling alone in the world at this point, but I was me and I was asking some serious questions of me. Was I really sure God wanted me

here at this point in time? Frankly, NO. There was not a verse in the Bible that could assure me, not one that referred specifically to Mombasa, Kampala or the hundreds of miles between the two. There were some great verses, promises that had been enough to make us begin the long journey from the outskirts of Toronto to this point. I believed those general promises on which all Christian missionaries could rely. But I now also needed some reassurance that had a unique and special meaning for me.

My feeble faith could find support in thinking through past events in my life in which I had learned something of God's nature, consistent behavior and attitude. These were enough to dispel present fears.

Manoah's wife had encouraged her husband with just one recent premise which was like a threefold cord -- the Lord had not killed them so far, had accepted their sacrifice and also revealed some of His plans to them; was He likely to destroy them? The Lord had brought me and mine to this time and place. Was He likely to let us go it on our own now? I learned to rest on the promises, but also to gratefully review the premises (former mercies) I had experienced. The most wonderful demonstration of God's nature was demonstrated on the Cross. He "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, [that is the premise], "how shall He not..." I must leave you to complete Rom. 8: 32. for yourself, not only as to the words, but how you will let their truth strengthen your faith.



The King's Daughter

by Ruth Spender

Recently while standing in the checkout line at the local grocery store, my eyes fell on the weekly tabloids. A royal prince had been born. The royal family was presenting their heir for all the world to see. I secretly wondered what it might be like to grow up in such a privileged setting.

In Exodus 19:4-8, we read the story of God's ancient people and how He

had borne them on eagles wings, bringing them to Himself. The Israelites were given a

conditional promise. If they would be His special treasure, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, the Lord's favor would rest upon them. Sadly, the Israelites were unable to keep the Law in their own strength. The evidence lay in the broken tablets at the foot of Mount Sinai. [Exodus 31:18-32:19]

Today, we live in the age of God's grace. Our Lord is still looking for royals who would serve Him wholeheartedly. In 1 Peter 2:9, we read the familiar words of this same covenant found in the Old Testament. We are His special treasure! We have been chosen in

Him before the foundation of the world. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a people of His own that we should show forth the praises of Him who has brought us out of darkness into His marvelous light." We can be victorious, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." [Philippians 2:13].

Yes, we have royal work to do

Yes, we have royal work to do each and every day for our Master, but it is only as we commune with Him that He becomes more precious to us.

each and every day for our Master, but it is only as we commune with Him that He

becomes more precious to us. May we seek to hear His voice early in the morning. Holiness is our pursuit. May we, as the sheep of His pasture, follow and obey our Master's bidding. Not always easy as a busy mom or wife, but it's the key to being the support for our husband that God calls us to be.

"The king's daughter is all glorious within. . . ." Psalm 45:13. It is a great honor to be a daughter of the King.



From the Q-File

It is written of Daniel's enemies "They could find no occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him." (Daniel 6:4).

It is sadly true that such a testimony could never have been given concerning any American president, not even Washington or Lincoln, as great and praiseworthy as they were. Nevertheless, God would remind us "that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

HM Morris



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Contact Info: *Elders' ShopNotes*, c/o 112 Doolittle Dr. Bethany, CT. 06524 USA; email: alan7s@yahoo.com Phone: 203-393-0078.

Publisher/Editor: Jack Spender
Editorial assistance: Ruth Rodger
Layout, Technical Asst: Sherri Jason

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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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