



Editor's Note

This issue of Elders ShopNotes differs from the usual format in a couple of ways. First, you'll find a challenging article by Crawford Paul which was adapted from a website with which he is connected, (see "Helpful Links" p.4). I liked the article because it avoids a lamenting tone often found in such subjects, and it provides a number of solid, practical suggestions.

Second, there is a short article on the "honor" due to elders taken from a little book on church themes by brother Don Norbie. We don't usually reprint portions from books, but the subject is one of perennial interest, and the treatment is brief, Biblical, and thought provoking. Enjoy them both!

Jack Spender

Practical Ministry

Where Have All the Elders Gone? *by Crawford Paul*

An alarming trend seems to be happening in many Christian assemblies in North America. Many assemblies have just a few elders, with no upcoming younger men ready to step in. Many assemblies have lost elders (death, moved geographically or stepped down) with none to replace them. If this continues it is obvious the negative impact it will have.

Defining elders

Let me clarify what I mean by elders. I'm specifically thinking of shepherds, those who genuinely care for the spiritual well-being of the local churches they are leading. Biblically these are the pastors. They feed, nurture, protect and care for the sheep. They are invested in the lives of the flock. They are not merely decision makers or administrators or event planners.

They are also not merely firemen who put out fires when they arise but are proactively on the alert for the attack of the enemy and the disease of sin within the group.

A significant need

It's not too much of a stretch to say that in order for any assembly to grow and maintain a healthy spiritual state, strong elders will need to be in place to lead the people of God. We need strong shepherds who will give their lives for the sheep. Not as a hobby but as a passion to lead the people of God into a greater knowledge and relationship with the Lord Jesus.

We need more shepherds who will visit the weary and encourage them in the way. We need more shepherds who will admonish the unruly in love and grace and point them to the Savior. We need more shepherds who will feed the hungry with

the Word of God. Above all, we need more shepherds who will lead the flock by example, modeling the way of faith and devotion to the Lord.

Simple observations

As I speak to many in assemblies there are some common traits that keep coming up. These observations do not apply to every assembly or region but they do apply to many. I am sure there are others that could be added to this list.

- **Discipleship has been dropped in many assemblies.** Elders need to be disciple-makers. Many elders have no young man or group of men they are discipling. This is a tragedy, as without discipleship there can be no hope for real growth in others.
- **Visitation is a thing of the past.** To many elders, visitation means a visit to a home only when there is a problem. Elders who care about the saints will be active in visiting them on a regular basis to pray with them and to listen to the needs that are causing heartache.
- **A lack of decision.** One comment I keep hearing is that, "Our elders take forever to make decisions." Leadership that can't make decisions in a reasonable time will frustrate the people of God and create mistrust.
- **No plan to train up others.** Elders who are proactive in training up younger men will be prepared to meet the needs of the leadership as older men are no longer able. It's healthy to

(Continued on page 3)

We continue our meditations in the book of Acts, with particular notice of leadership in the churches. Chapter 13 will be our text; an important one, because in it we find the origin of Christian missionary effort.

The opening verses are filled with insight. Although Antioch was a comparatively young church, spiritually gifted individuals could already be recognized, and were functioning together. It is noteworthy that they are "prophets and teachers," rather than "elders and deacons." A mature church will have both gifted men to speak the Word of the Lord and equip the saints (Eph. 4:11,12), and office bearers with the authority to oversee the work. Too often it is assumed that an assembly's gifted men and its board of elders are merely synonyms referring to the same group. It is easy for government to eclipse gift, but both have a place in the Lord's work.

It is also noteworthy that the particular activity in which they were engaged at the time, was not public ministry to the people, but private ministry to the Lord, accompanied by fasting. Apparently they sensed some need for guidance from the Lord, and the discipline of fasting would indicate sincerity and urgency in their deliberations and prayers. Church leaders today ought to ponder this example! How long has it been since such self-denial has formed part of a leadership gathering?

The Call of God

Suddenly, the Lord spoke in a way that was clear enough to understand and obey.

Here was the answer to the question: "What's next?" A clear word tends to unite good leaders who seek unanimous decisions, who will not be satisfied by "majority rule." Politics has no place in the church. Note that the Lord does not call novices to difficult endeavors, but rather those who have been serving and are well known to the church.

In just a few words, the Lord provides not only the direction for which they had presumably been seeking, but a timeless spiritual principle to guide in the recognizing and commending of

servants being sent out on a mission. Not only did He choose the messengers, but He intimated that at some prior time they had received a call, and were waiting on the Lord to confirm it to their brethren. Does this not strengthen the idea that the group sensed the working of the Spirit of God, knowing that He could bring unity where perceptions might differ at the outset?

Let us be careful not to miss the point. The first missionaries in the church had heard the call of God for special service, but this was only half of what was needed. The Lord then faithfully confirmed this call to the church, especially those who would supply leadership. When this two-fold communication had been completed, it could be written that the servants were "sent out by the Holy Spirit."

It is vitally important that the church emulate this example today. People going out in the work without the support of the church in which they have been involved, and churches sending out people who have not been called by God, are courting failure. Are we not yet fully sure of the one or the other? Then the advice of James fits perfectly: "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." (James 4:8). Spending time in the Lord's presence, especially when accompanied by fasting will surely bring a blessing.

Before passing on to the travels of Paul and Barnabas, it might be helpful to notice some things that are not recorded. We do not read of any guarantee of support, financial or otherwise on the part of the church. Nor do those sent delay going until they have raised pledges of financial commitments through what is commonly called "deputation." This is not to say that these are wrong, only that there is a difference between essentials and non-essentials. Servants must be convinced that the faith about which they will preach is a daily experience in their own lives, and in no area can this be more unmistakably seen than in how the Lord supplies daily bread and every other need.

The First Missionary Journey

Space does not allow a running

commentary on all the travels and adventures of Paul and his coworkers in the three missionary journeys covered in Acts 13 - 20, but there are four passages that merit our careful study as they involve the matter of church leadership by elders. Two are brief sections in chapters 14 and 16, and two are lengthy sections in chapters 15 and 20.

After being commended to the Lord's work in chapter 13, Paul and Barnabas spent some time on the island of Cyprus before visiting cities on the mainland in the province of Galatia. Several brief observations will take us to the verses of particular interest in chapter 14.

We note that whenever possible, Paul chose to work in cities or population centers where the gospel would get the largest hearing. He often began in the Jewish synagogue, because he would have an open door there, knowing the language and the customs. If the message was rejected, he refused to waste time, but quickly turned to working among the Gentiles. In each journey, the record documents a balance of preaching good news and rendering practical help to those in need. Finally, while Paul took every opportunity to evangelize areas where his message was not known, once an assembly was begun, his emphasis shifted to strengthening the disciples.

In most of chapter 14, we have the record of his work in several cities of the province of Galatia. After travelling many miles, and seeing a number of new churches begun as the new believers were gathered into local congregations, he and Barnabas decided to revisit some of those new assemblies before heading home. We could wish that Luke might have devoted more space to what happened next, but we have only 3 verses to examine in detail.

The main point is that the missionaries could already see sufficient progress to warrant the recognition of elders in the young churches! But some fascinating details as to how this took place have been recorded, and, Lord willing, this will be our subject in the next article, part 6 of this series.



Biblical Teaching

Double Honor in I Timothy 5:17

by Don Norbie

To what does "double honor" in I Tim. 5:17 refer?

Most denominational expositors explain this as financial remuneration and apply it to the pastor of the church. However, as one studies the Scripture he discovers that there is no parallel to the office of "pastor" in the early assemblies. There were elders, but no one "pastor."

Does it mean that certain elders are to be supported financially?

Without even considering the verse this would seem unlikely. Those early assemblies were usually comparatively small, often meeting in homes (cf. Col. 4: 15). Perhaps many of them did not number more than fifty in fellowship at the most. Today a church of one hundred members can hardly support one "pastor." Is it likely that a small group of believers could provide financial support for several elders?

The word "honor" is the Greek word *'time'*, which means a "valuing." It is used at times of the value or price of an object (Matt. 27:9; Acts 5:3). It is used most frequently in the New Testament to mean "esteem" or "honor" (Rom. 12:10, 13:7; I Cor.

12:23; I Tim. 6:1; Heb. 5:4; et. al). Nowhere is the word used to mean "pay," "wages," or "hire." The Greek word *'misthos'* is used in such cases. (Cp. R. C. H. Lenski on I Tim. 5: 17.)

Apparently all elders are to receive some "honor." Those who reveal good leadership and labor in teaching deserve additional "honor." If this is referring to money, then all elders are to receive some and certain others are to receive a double allowance. It should be obvious that this is an impossible situation, completely contrary to the spirit of God's Word (I Peter 5: 2). If "esteem" is understood, then the passage fits beautifully with all of the other passages concerning the elders.

Paul quotes the passage about the ox from Deut. 25 :4. He puts beside this the statement of the Lord Jesus which is recorded in Luke 10:7. Both are equally authoritative; they have the same source. Both state that one who labors should receive a return, a reward. The reward or pay will differ with the circumstances. For the ox it was the mouthful of grain snatched from the threshing floor as he made his wearisome round. For a day laborer it means the sum of money he re-

ceives at the end of the day. For the elder it means the esteem and love of God's people as they affectionately look to him for guidance and help.

In conclusion we would quote Paul's words elsewhere which provide a good commentary on our verse. "But we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake." (I Thess. 5:12, 13, A. S. v.)

ESM

(Excerpt from the book *The Early Church*, by Don Norbie)

"Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak." (Acts 20:34,35 NKJV)

(A supporting passage quoted from brother Norbie's spoken ministry - editor)

Where Have All the Elders Gone? (continued from page 1)

have new, fresh insight into the leadership of the church.

- **Elders who refuse to give up control.** This is a major issue in many assemblies as many elders try to hang onto control too long and do not allow or encourage younger men to take up leadership.
- **Elders who refuse to change.** It's a sad reality that some assemblies have lost a large number of solid men and women because of elders who refused to make needed changes within the church. Holding onto preferences and preaching them as doctrine has cost us dearly.

A note to young men

There has been a lot of criticism about the lack of younger men who are ready to step up into leadership. We can point fingers and say that it's someone

else's fault but the reality is that we need to be seeking the Lord and taking our responsibility seriously. Much of the criticism is unfounded but much isn't.

I see men in their 30's and 40's more interested in video games, cars, sports, making money, TV and movies than they are about the Word of God, the people of God and prayer. I see young people who don't think the people of God are a high enough priority to make it out to a Sunday night or mid-week meeting.

The plague of materialism and the quest for pleasure and comfort seem to be front and center while the Lord Jesus is pushed off into a corner. It may be that you (young man) want to follow the Lord but are held back by sin and can't break free.

All of these scenarios require one thing: repentance – a genuine falling on our knees before the Lord and say-

ing, "I'm yours! All of me."

Conclusion

I care about assemblies so deeply. I want to see them grow and be a vibrant testimony for the Lord. Many are, and I thank God for each assembly in tune with the Holy Spirit. I am thankful for elders who lead by example and care intimately about the saints in their fellowship. Unfortunately, many assemblies are perishing from a lack of vision and shepherding. May we all present our lives as living sacrifices and seek His face to help us be the leaders He wants us to be in humility and grace!

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(Adapted from the website www.assemblyhub.com May 26, 2015)

Wives' Corner

Sing Your Praise

by Maria Forcucci

I have been convicted. It was during one Breaking of Bread meeting when the Lord seemed to tap me on the shoulder and bid me to open my eyes. This came after a few weeks of hosting a private pity party. I had let the enemy convince me that all is lost, we are all hopeless in our despair, and victory in Jesus is for other people, other churches.

I had not seen growth in myself, nor anyone else. There were personal problems that seemed insurmountable, and well, a bit embarrassing. My elder husband and I were hurting, and yet strove to remain that "strong tower" for others, our angst undetectable to the naked eye.

Had we been faithful? Yes, as best we could be through surgeries, loss of a loved one, a pair of long battles with upper respiratory ailments, a long winter, and some other personal attacks of the enemy. There were a few good friends that discerned our condition and beautifully ministered to us. However, it was my inability to encourage myself in the Lord that added a weighty disappointment to the other problems.

So what had the Lord revealed to me that blessed Lord's Supper morning? "Look around, Maria. Look at all the ...PEOPLE. Are some of them hard to love? Yes. Are some struggling? Yes. Do some look bored? Yes. Are some here for the wrong reasons? Proba-

bly.....but here they are! Have you forgotten my voice that started your own journey?"

"Come to Me all ye who labor and are heavy burdened and I shall give you rest. Take up My yoke... for My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Tears welled up in my eyes as I seemed to hear Him say, "Anyone who comes to me, I will in no way cast out." It is still true! Hallelujah!

The saints in our assembly, all of us, as imperfect as we are, were answering His call as we did faithfully every Lord's Day morning. And when I began to give thanks to Him for all of the crazy characters that make up our local church fellowship, the Lord graciously showed me other things.

Look at Ben...10 years old and helping his dad pass the emblems. Nicholas, 8, eyes closed and undeniably worshipping the Lord. Wow! That one hasn't been here in a few weeks. I'm so glad she's back! This one sat through the whole worship without getting up ... that's progress. "You see, Maria, I am still at work. Just open your eyes!"

Of course, this wasn't the last day of my complaining or having a negative attitude, but the Lord, once again, graciously admonished me and met my need for encouragement. He doesn't have to do that, but it still amazes me that He wants to!

So what is my point? We can acknowledge it is hard work to be in an assembly where our husbands may be criticized, or needed more outside the house than in, or counseling those who will not heed the truth. It is hard to watch people fall, who would rather stay in the mire than climb out. Spiritual life is hard.

Yet, as difficult as these examples may be, if we believe anything about the Lord, we can believe this: He is still working. He will not give up on us. Phil 2:13 is still true. "For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." And, "He who began a good work in you *will be faithful to complete it.*" Just open your eyes!

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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.

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"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ..." 1 Peter 5:2a NIV