



Editor's Note

A new resource is available online at www.bible-equip.com which provides a growing archive of essays, pamphlets and articles that will help equip believers and leaders. Check back frequently as we continue to upload many more resources on a regular basis.

Also, don't forget our new web location for

ESN at www.bible-equip.com/esn. There you can download all back issues. Soon we will be adding links to very useful web-sites for bible study and various helpful Christian resources.

Thanks to all of you who help make this publication possible. 

Leadership Principles Developing A Shepherd's Heart--Part 2

by Chuck Gianotti

As elders, we are to shepherd God's people. One way to discern what God desires in those who shepherd His flock is to notice what He detests in poor shepherding. As we mentioned in the last issue, God judged straying Israel by promising to give them over to a "worthless shepherd." None of us wants that epithet imprinted on our office wall plaque.

Let's look at Zechariah 11:16-17 again. If, by contrast, we want to be "worthwhile" shepherds, we can see seven thoughts derived from this passage about the kind of shepherding God desires.

Care for the lost

A godly elder has a heart for those who stray from God's way. In context, the passage is not speaking of those who have not yet come, but of those who have wandered off. While, certainly, all Christians should have a concern for the salvation of the "lost," godly elders have a compassion for the one who wanders off from the Lord and gets "lost" in the quagmire of sin,

doctrinal error, callousness or spiritual neglect. They do not "write him off" or have a condemning attitude toward the straying brother or sister, but a deep desire, born of love, to win him back.

Seek the young

The young in faith have a special place in the shepherding focus of elders. The early, formative years of a "baby Christian" are like wet cement which soon sets and then becomes firm. What better time is spent than helping a young believer grow strong in the faith? Also, to use another well-know analogy: it is more effective to build fences at top of a cliff than spend all your time healing the broken sheep at the bottom. By giving attention to the young in faith, you minimize the need to help "heal them" later (at the bottom of the cliff). I find my favorite aspect of ministry is working with new or young Christians.

Heal the injured

Despite the best shepherding, people still get hurt. Either they bring their difficulties with them

when they become believers or troubles develop afterward. Much of elders' work involves "healing," that is, providing the nurture, support and encouragement that God wants to use in bringing people to spiritual and emotional wholeness. It is so easy to disregard the weak in our fellowship, yet a church reaching a broken world will invariably find people with shattered lives and relationships.

They come because we have the message of hope and healing. Unfortunately, not all of their "baggage" is left at the cross. But, lest we groan and think, "Not another one!" or lest we exhort superficially "Get over it!"—elders absolutely must look to God for the compassion, strength and wisdom to know how to respond and help where they can. The One who calls you to be an elder,

also said, "...you have the poor with you always" (Matthew 26:11). These folks are not an obstacle to your church's ministry—they are part of your ministry.

Feed the healthy

We must not overlook those who seem to be doing well

spiritually—they need attention also. I have heard of more than one church that had a thriving ministry to street kids, while neglecting the needs of kids from Christian homes. Even mature "sheep" will grow weak and sickly if not shepherded.

Strengthening and training the whole congregation will help prevent healthy Christians from becoming "injured" or "lost."

Don't eat the meat of the choice sheep

It is relatively easy to fall into the trap of using the elder "position" to enhance one's own well-being or gain the prominence, in other words, to

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... I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs. Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock...

Zechariah 11:16-17 (NIV)

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Biblical Foundations Discipline in the Church

by Jack Spender

A growing church is a beautiful sight, assuming the growth is genuine and solid. Those who observe large numbers of people streaming into a church can, regrettably, forget the problems that growth can bring. As open sin becomes more prevalent in society, there are increased risks to the church. People coming into the fellowship by salvation or transfer can bring along real baggage from the past. Those in regular fellowship can be influenced by sin in the world and become ensnared by various lusts. Doctrinal problems can creep in.

What happens when serious sin is discovered in the church? What should be done? Anyone reading the Corinthian correspondence will note that the early believers faced this problem. Fortunately, the apostles were quick to write instructions for the young churches, and these writings contain all that we need today to practice godly discipline in the church.

REMEMBER A FEW BASICS

- Discipline is not a synonym for excommunication (“putting someone out of fellowship”), even though some people use it that way. All corrections and exercises in training are disciplines beginning with the simplest instructions e.g., “Please close that door.” Putting a person out of fellowship is the most serious form of discipline and is sometimes the culmination of unsuccessful attempts to solve a growing problem. Elders ought to ask themselves how the matter got to be this serious. Do they have a healthy understanding of the many lesser steps that overseers can take as they work with someone struggling with personal problems that could become public sin?

- The goal of all discipline is restoration. Even in the most serious cases, the desired effect is repentance, confession, restoration. This positive progression can be traced in the matter of the sinning man at Corinth in I Corinthians 5 and II Corinthians 2, 7. Leaders must be certain that all efforts and communications pertaining to excommunication spring from hearts that earnestly desire to see the sinner restored to fellowship. We may have private thoughts about the validity of such a person’s testimony, but since he has been called “a brother,” and we cannot know the heart, we must think of him as one of Christ’s sheep gone astray until the Lord brings hidden things to light.

- Procrastination can multiply the damage. In both doctrinal and moral evil, the Scripture is clear: leaven spreads and in time will infect the whole (I Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). The wise man wrote truly: “*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*” (Eccl 8:11 KJV)). Certainly there is a time for prayer, fact finding and perhaps even fasting. A rush to judgment is unworthy of godly leaders. But let there be no undue delay! Think of an infection in the body. The doctors consult and move quickly lest the situation get out of control. So must it be in the church. More than one darkened lampstand can bear witness to the truth of this.

- Not all sins are of equal danger to the health and testimony of the Christian community. Moral evils of a most serious

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nature are clearly listed in I Cor. 5:11: “*But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.*” Understanding of the exact meaning of some of these terms may vary among leaders, but we are wise to consider this list sufficient for our needs for moral issues. Serious doctrinal evils involve error in the fundamentals of the faith, and many would hold that there must be in addition to the error, the active work of “*teaching things which they ought not*” (Titus 1:11), i.e., unwillingness to keep silent.

GUIDELINES

Now let’s consider ten guidelines suggested by the text of I Corinthians 5 as we learn how to proceed when serious sin has arisen and attempts to resolve the matter through repentance have not been fruitful.

1. Attention to the heart condition of the church (vs. 2). If pride or boasting are present, the beam must be first removed from our own eye by confession and humbling before God or we shall not see

clearly in the matter at hand (Matt 7:3-5).

2. Adequate research into the matter (vs. 2). More is implied by the expression “this deed” than expressed in this passage, but research is always essential to righteousness judgment as taught in many other passages (see II Cor 13:1).

3. Prayer for God’s intervention (vs. 2). The anguished cry of the heart to God over sin, the realization that God’s holy Name and the gathering of His saints are being tarnished move all to seek God’s intervention directly or through their obedience.

4. Courageous facing of sin (vs. 3). Paul has set the example and faced the matter squarely. Sin called by softer names is more likely to be tolerated.

5. The call to united action (vs. 4). There is no Biblical warrant for leaving this action to the elders to handle in private. Elders may take the lead, but the entire assembly must have one mind and resolve or the discipline will not work.

6. Conviction of God-given authority to act (vs. 4,5). This is not a group against a person. Believers acting “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” are only submitting to the authority of the Lord by handing the person over to Satan.

7. Love for the sinner (vs. 5). Once the sin has been mentioned (vs. 1), Paul does not dwell on the details or describe it. All succeeding references are to the person (vss. 2,3,5,13). Harsh as the action in verse 5 may sound, there is no hint of getting rid of the man but that in the end he may be saved. Incidentally, we should note that the Greek word *sarx* means “flesh.” The desired effect is to break that control of the sin nature over the physical body which combination is referred to in Scripture as the flesh. To destroy the “sinful nature”, as some translate, can only mean physical death to the sinning man, as the sinful nature cannot be removed in any other way during this life.

8. Clear and open communication (vs. 5). This is implied, but obvious from Paul’s clear speech and forthright handling of the whole matter. We ought to note that there are dangers involved in public statements about people in today’s world, and the

Discipline (continued from p. 2)

assembly ought to be wise in all public communications. Observing a few simple safeguards such as reading and posting disciplinary actions, basing them on words of Scripture and confirmed statements of the offender, and making sure all actions are the unified conviction of the group, will go a long way to avoiding repercussions. In some cases, professional counsel can outline ways to prevent needless problems when handling excommunication within the church.

9. Understanding the nature of broken fellowship (vs. 9). Those who lead should help the community of believers understand what has really happened. The sinning man has broken fellowship with Christ. The church must now (as the body of Christ) take the same action as the Head. There can be no thought of schism, i.e., some part of the body siding with and defending the one who has done wrong.

10. Strong, godly leadership (vs. 3, 4; 6:5) We may trace through the account the firm and courageous leadership of Paul. He has judged with Godly discernment, written with boldness and clarity, and now stands with them as if present.

If we had only the I Corinthians 5 passage to instruct us, the benefit would be great. But inspiration has also preserved a record of the outcome. In II Corinthians we learn how things worked out in the end. In 2:6-11, it is clear that the action taken was successful, the sinning brother repented. The believers must now reach out and receive him back into the warmth of fellowship. This must not be delayed lest he become the victim of excessive sorrow. And it must be genuine, not a half-hearted "OK you can come back now" but presumably like the joy of heaven over a sinner that repents.

As an aside, one might ask what would have happened had the man not repented? Here is the wonderful part about obedience to God's word. If the sinner repents, the church regains a brother and a friend. If he does not repent, losses are kept to a minimum, the protection of the flock is secured, and the testimony of the church maintained in holiness.

In II Corinthians (next issue of ESN) we learn not only how things turned out with the sinning man, but we will get a look behind the scenes at the underlying relational problems at Corinth. 

Resource Recommendation

The Cross of Christ, by John R.W. Stott (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL). 1986, 351pp.

Nothing is more important to the Christian walk than a solid foundation of truth. At the core of truth is the cross of Christ. Fundamental to Shepherding God's people is having an in-depth knowledge of what took place there. I believe we will spend eternity discovering the depth of what God has done in Christ.

Dr. Stott has given us a masterful work on the meaning of the cross of our Savior. Forged through the debates and conflicts with liberalism over the years, this volume rings out the truth with clarity and conviction. His careful explanations and interpretations will help you stand in awe of our wonderful Lord.

As with all teachers, preachers and authors, you may not agree with everything Dr. Stott writes, but the discerning elder will find much in this work that is right on target. You won't be disappointed. 

Wives' Corner

God's Holiness, My Sinfulness

by Mary Gianotti

You and I have the unique calling of God to the role of an elder's wife. It is important that we maintain a clear spiritual vision so that we can be effective in encouraging our husbands and those in our fellowship.

Patsy Claremont once said "Frequently in my life I have not been able to see clearly. I wish that I could run to the corner drug store buy some spiritual Mureen put a few drops in each eye hoping life to become crystal clear." Our spiritual vision can so easily become clouded. As a result we sometimes do not see who God really is, we question and doubt His ways. Restlessness and discontentment may characterize us; we desperately look for other things to fill our lives. Satisfaction eludes us because our spiritual vision is clouded.

Recently the Lord used a situation to give me a clearer view of his holiness and my sinfulness. While visiting in a home some time ago, I picked up a novel that was lying face down on the table, marking the reader's spot. I randomly began to read and was shocked. The description of

sexual intimacy and infidelity made me close the book quickly. Then a sickening realization came over me. This was the book of an elder's wife! My sickness turned into sorrow.

Over the next few days, the Lord began to whisper ever so gently in my ear "I am holy." I found myself meditating on Isaiah's experience in the throne room of God. It is here he sees God high and lifted up, he hears the seraph's crying out "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is filled with his glory!" (Isaiah 6:3) At that moment Isaiah thought he had breathed his last. Who can stand and live in the presence of such holiness. By a gracious act of God his sins were purified and his guilt burned away. After that experience I'm sure he had a clearer understanding of his sinfulness, redemption and God's holiness.

Our vision of God is affected by our opinion of ourselves. My first thought after picking up that novel was, I would never read something like this. Then the Holy Spirit began to convict me about things I think, attitudes towards others,

stubbornness... the list goes on. Sin is like a thick cloud distorting my view of God causing me to doubt His trustworthiness, His intimate love for me, His being in control of a seemingly out-of-control situations. That is why we are encouraged in Hebrew 12:1 to throw off sin that will so easily entangle us.

How easily I detect the sin in others. What did Jesus say? We see the speck in someone else's eye and miss the log in our own eye (Matt 7:3-5). As elder's wives seeking to serve God with clear spiritual vision may this song written by Paul Baloche become our prayer.

Open the eyes of my heart Lord
Open the eyes of my heart
I want to see You,
I want to see You

To see You high and lifted up
Shining in the light of Your glory
Pour out Your power and love,
As we sing holy, holy, holy
I want to see You,
I want to see You



Practical Ministry Are Elders' Ever Wrong?

by Chuck Gianotti

Are elders ever wrong or do they make mistakes? The question sounds somewhat ludicrous, doesn't it? Of course, elders are sometimes wrong and can certainly make mistakes, despite the most sincerely efforts and prayer. That being true, what does an elder do when he is wrong?

Keep in mind, the rest of the congregation probably knows when you are wrong. I believe they can handle that. The real issue for them is—how do you handle things when you are wrong?

The first step is to honestly admit it

to yourself and then to the Lord. Next quickly admit it to those affected. Many are the jokes about politicians who deny or "spin" what everyone knows to be true. This shouldn't be the case for spiritual leaders.

If James 5:16 applies to all Christians, it behooves elders to lead the way: "*Confess your sins to each other ...*" This includes asking forgiveness, if necessary.

What does this accomplish? First, you become more credible in the eyes of others, because they see that you are not teaching people what you yourself don't

put into practice. Rather than making you look weak, it shows you to be a humble, faithful leader.

Second, dealing with reality is always better than embracing falsehood. The sooner you admit your fault, the sooner you can move ahead in truth.

Third, the time otherwise wasted defending yourself can be better be spent ministering to others.

Having had much experience in being wrong, I have found the best thing to do when wrong is quickly admit it, seek forgiveness and move ahead in the work. 

Shepherd's Heart

(continued from page 1)

"get the best part." Some might even see the position of elder as having certain "perks," such as having control over the announcements, a chair on the platform or determining the speaker "booking schedule." One church I know put a notice in the city paper announcing the appointment of ... a prominent businessperson as a new elder in the church. The only "perk" worthwhile to the godly elders is the prospect of hearing these words from our Master: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Don't tear off their hoofs

Elders shouldn't use their position to hamstring those who disagree. Clearly, elders have a certain authority before God that comes with their responsibility for the flock. It is one thing to disagree with a brother or even correct him. But, don't "tear off his hoofs." Don't belittle

him, ignore him, or undermine him. Kindness and gentleness are important qualities for a spiritual leader. Remember, the One to whom you are accountable in shepherding--this is His church which He "*bought with his own blood*" (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 3:15).

Don't desert the flock

An elder is in it for the long haul. I know there is a debate on whether a man is an elder for life or not--but a shepherd whom God finds worthwhile, develops the spiritual stamina to weather many difficulties and won't irresponsibly leave when things don't suit him. I must admit there have been times, when I wanted to quit due to the pressures and difficulties of being a spiritual leader in the church. Sometimes, this work is just plain hard! One elder used to quip with subtle humor, "Doing the work of an elder wouldn't be

so bad, if it weren't for the people."

What is needed for today's church are men who have, what one brother described as, "broad shoulders and large hearts"--nurtured at the feet of the One says, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" (Hebrew 13:5).

Interestingly, our verses in Zechariah 11:16-17 follow the passage about 30 pieces of silver (11:12), the prophecy applied to Judas, the apostle who permanently deserted his work. Fortunately, there were 11 others (plus Judas' replacement) who carried on with perseverance.

These seven principles of shepherding contrast with the characteristics of a "worthless Shepherd." The elder who commits himself to these is well on his way to becoming a "worthwhile" shepherd for the Lord. 

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

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