



## Editor's Note

Greetings to our readers in this New Year! Whenever we see dates written in historical notation, e.g., 2016 AD, we're reminded by the "AD" that this is another "Year of our Lord." Even godless teachers and institutions around the world must use it. What a privilege to know the One Who is "the Lord," and to know that He is with us throughout the coming year.

In this issue, we have a fine article by brother David Dunlap who serves the Lord in Florida. Also, the concluding article on leadership studies in the book of Acts, and for the

"Wives Corner," a letter written by a young sister who is going through trials in her marriage. A bit out of the ordinary, but refreshing, and a good reminder to pray for the young families in our local fellowships, being sensitive especially to those who may be struggling and need encouragement from the Lord.

May His abundant blessings be your portion in the coming year, as we all remember to, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the LORD." Psalms 27:14

### Practical Ministry

## Declare the Whole Counsel of God

by David Dunlap

The Bible is God's life-transforming message for the church. Therefore, we are exhorted to declare "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). We read early in the book of Acts that the believers, "continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine, fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Paul counsels Timothy, "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). The Word of God taught in the power of the Holy Spirit is an indispensable discipline for the local church.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of the elders of a local New Testament church to provide a balanced spiritual diet in the ministry of the Word. Unfortunately, in many New Testament churches the spiritual diet is a barren, uninspired, and unorganized presentation of the Word of God. Believers are hungering for all the Scriptures to be taught with power, conviction, and with a sound biblical understanding. Jim Elliot once wrote about his own preaching:

*"I was terribly depressed after preaching tonight. Felt as though I had no preparation, no liberty, no power. I felt compelled to stop during the sermon and tell the people I didn't have a message from God...I never want to preach that way again. How sadly and slowly I am learning that loud preaching and long preaching are no substitutes for inspired preaching."*<sup>1</sup>

His exhortation that "...loud preaching and long preaching are no substitutes for inspired preaching" needs a greater

re-application today.

### Providing a Balanced Spiritual Diet

How can a local church improve the quality of the ministry of the Word of God?

1. **Ministry Guidelines** – Not infrequently, the ministry of the Word is handled by men who either are not gifted, or are gifted but very busy; or it is taken by a capable brother from the outside who may be just filling a date on his calendar. First of all, the goal should be that the majority (80-85%) of the teaching of the Word of God should be from within the local assembly. The elders should carry a greater load in teaching than the others in the assembly. Through their teaching, they deliver quality, focused ministry, gain spiritual authority among the believers, and provide a godly example of gifted ministry. If there are only a few gifted men, they should faithfully carry the preaching load until the Lord brings in other gifted men. Elders should exercise a discerning eye on new ones and younger men who can minister the Word effectively. In one assembly, a gifted young man was in that assembly for well over a year before he was given any opportunity to speak. Men who are not gifted in the ministry of the Word should be gently directed to other areas of service in which they are gifted. Outside speakers should be used on an average of one Sunday per five-six weeks. An assembly that does not seek, train, and use gift within will become spiritually weak and eventually close its doors.

(Continued on page 3)

# Biblical Foundations

## Studies in Acts—Part 8

by Jack Spender

### The Elders of Ephesus

Our final study of church leadership will be in Acts 20. The missionary journeys draw to a conclusion, and the remainder of the book is devoted to Paul's trial and closing years. The setting of this passage is interesting. Paul spent time in Philippi, and came next to Troas (20:6), where he spent a week preaching the Word. It is noteworthy, that even with such a renowned guest, the stated reason for the gathering of the disciples was to break bread on the first day of the week (vs. 7).

After several more stops, we read of his famous visit to Miletus where he addressed the elders from the church at Ephesus. Making his way toward Jerusalem, Paul did not want to head into the city of Ephesus, so he sent for the elders of the church to come to him at the seaport town of Miletus. Ephesus was an important city, and we can take Paul's words to the elders as representative of what he might say to any assembly. Incidentally, Ephesus is the only church for which we have a record of its founding in the book of Acts, an epistle from Paul, and a letter from the risen Lord in Revelation 2, 3.

Now, some 25 years having passed since Pentecost, this expression "the elders of the church" had evidently come to represent the normal mode of church leadership of that day. Paul did not need to provide a list of names, nor hold discussions about which men should be included. Those summoned were obviously a known and recognized group.

His brief address to them can be outlined simply; the first section contains his personal testimony, (18 - 27), and the second part his final exhortations (28 - 35). This is a rich passage for all who do shepherding work among the people of God, and we can only suggest a few lessons along the way.

### Paul's Testimony

As to Paul's testimony, these men knew what he was like, the way he worked, his faithfulness, and finally his desire to finish well even if it should cost him his life.

He was glad to take a humble place among them; he had no selfish ambition and served even though he faced many personal hardships. Twice he mentioned his tears, which prove that for him, the work of shepherding people was not a hobby or a pleasant pastime, but a life and death struggle against evil.

He employed two critical ingredients in discipleship; to show and to teach (vs. 20), reminding us of Luke's earlier book, in which he documented "all that Jesus began to do and teach." (Acts 1:1). And this, Paul carried out continually in two spheres; in public and in homes (20:20), a pattern used from the earliest days of the church (see Acts 2:46; 5:42).

His public testimony to the lost was a clear, simple message of repentance and faith (vs. 21). And for the believers, his key word is "grace." By his own example, he would stake his very life on the grace of God (22 - 26), and entrust the believers and the church to that grace.

What an impact this summary statement must have had on these elders; "I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." These words ought to challenge every true elder. Are we actively seeking to teach the saints all that God has revealed? Experience has shown that this will not happen by chance. Elders must acquaint themselves with God's counsel, and then ensure that it is faithfully, and in a relevant manner expounded to the church. This usually requires planning, some record keeping and a healthy balance of doctrinal and practical ministry. If the church is to be healthy, we dare not simply fill in the calendar dates and hope for blessing!

### Paul's Exhortation

In his concluding remarks to these dear men, Paul speaks of the work they must do, the dangers they would face and the resource that would uphold them. Nothing has changed! Elders today must work hard, confront danger, and trust God's faithful provision to support them.

Two spheres of work are mentioned. In verse 20 there is the feeding of the flock, a reference to the work of teaching the believers God's Word, and not just favorite parts, but "all the counsel of God." (vs. 27). This requires a team effort, and teams can only be effective if there is unity of purpose and cooperation. Thus they must "take heed" or pay attention to their own board or group before overseeing the church. And although they function as overseers, the text describes their position as "among" (lit. Gk) the people.

The second sphere of work is found in vs. 33 - 35. Paul set an example in temporal matters by working with his own hands, not only to meet his personal needs, but also to help others on his team. Based

on his charge in verse 35, "I have shown you all things, how that so laboring . . ." we are justified in describing the typical church elder as one who holds ordinary employment in the world, and devotes time to the work of shepherding God's people.

An elder may, of course, be called by the Lord to lay aside his temporal vocation and devote himself to special service for the Lord. Paul himself was able to do this on occasion when the saints enabled him to do so by their sacrificial giving. But the normal pattern for church elders is ordinary men who have homes, families, employment in the work force, and yet care for the church and its needs. There is no place in the New Testament church for a professional clergy.

As to dangers, vigilance is required. Dangers arise both from outside and from within the church. The devil is both a roaring lion and a subtle serpent, and often the former is easier to recognize than the latter. Elders must make it a life goal to unify the people of God by leading them closer to the Lord. Those who seek to exalt themselves and tear apart the fellowship to promote their own agenda, bring sorrow and harm, and must be confronted. Paul tells Titus that their mouths must be stopped because they undermine the families of the church being motivated by the desire for personal gain (Titus 1:11).

As to God's mighty resources which uphold the elders, verse 32 is sublime. Paul commends or entrust them to God and to His word, which above all else is a word of grace! This word can edify them and give them a place in God's economy that they could never attain in this world, no matter how much fame and wealth they might amass.

### Conclusion

Dear elder, ponder this promise as the world makes its promises to you. God's inheritance does not fade away (I Pet. 1:4). Serving the Lord by shepherding people is hard work, and can become discouraging at times. Keep your eye upon what is eternal, and as time passes you will note that the gates of hell do not in fact prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18), even as the "inheritance" promised by the world continues to fade and corrupt on every hand.



## **Declare the Whole Counsel of God** (continued from page 1)

2. **Content** – The subject matter of the ministry should build up, challenge, and exhort to godly living. It should be doctrinal, practical, and applicable to the lives of the believers. The teaching should not be aimed at the youngest believer or the most mature believer, but towards the believers in the middle who are growing and eager learners. The ministry of the Word should be organized, spiritual, and doctrinally balanced. It should be superintended by godly leadership within the assembly. Sound doctrinal preaching produces sound mature Christians. The writer of Hebrews exhorts us: “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature...” (Heb. 5:13-14).

**a. Doctrinal Content** – Important topics should include messages on the doctrine of: the Church, great words of salvation (i.e., justification, etc.), Israel, basics of Dispensationalism, end-times prophecy, life of Christ (miracles, parables), and verse-by-verse exposition of books of the Bible. Messages on key passages of worship (Ps. 130, Isa. 53, Gen. 22), the doctrine of Satan, angels, and demons, doctrine of the Bible (inspiration, inerrancy, canon, etc.), and spiritual gifts are all needed in the church today.

**b. Majesty and Reverence of God** – Teaching on the person of Christ, attributes of God, and great works of God are desperately needed in our pulpits today. The Scriptures exhort us that “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.” It is essential for believers young and old to be gripped by the holiness and majesty of God. Reverence for God anchors the servant in the holy privilege of preaching. Respected writer A. W. Tozer exhorts:

*“I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.”<sup>2</sup>*

**c. Practical Content** – Messages on “How to Study the Bible”, biblical marriage, the Christian family, participation at the Lord’s Supper, “How to Lead a Child to Christ” are all important in fostering growth in the Christian life.

**d. Practical Disciplines** – Messages on “spiritual vision”, humility, prayer, faith, holiness, discipleship, obedience, witnessing to the unsaved, exchanged life (Romans 6-8) should be included in a healthy diet of ministry.

**e. Missions Emphasis** – Also important are messages on Paul’s missionary strategy in Acts, or topics such as, “What of Those Who Never Hear the Gospel?” Use the mid-week service once a quarter for “Missions Night” to pray and learn about missions. Be aware of missionaries who are passing through your area and invite them to minister on a Sunday morning or Wednesday evening.

**f. Warning of Error & Current Trends** – Messages on current trends such as: “Replacement Theology”, Cults (Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons), Roman Catholicism, creation/evolution, and apologetics are helpful and needed. The use of DVDs is very helpful in this area.

**g. Bible Conference Topics** – It is very beneficial to have an annual Bible conference. It can also be helpful to have a women’s conference or a youth retreat at the chapel or a nearby campground.

3. **Pitfalls** - Be discerning when some of your ministering saints swerve into doctrinal “hobbyhorse” topics or pick up unsound teaching. A form of ultra-dispensationalism promoted by a mid-west television Bible teacher has gained popularity among older believers. Some of his unsound ideas have often found their way to the pulpit. Often well-meaning brothers become passionate about conservative politics and want to use the pul-

pit to present their views. The pulpit is no place for politics, and politics almost always divides believers! Shepherds of the flock should be discerning guards of the preaching diet of the local church.

### **Conclusion**

The preaching of a balanced doctrinal diet will raise up strong and effective believers in Christ. When the Word of God is taught with passion and clarity, believers will know God more deeply, serve Christ more fervently, and worship Him more earnestly. May we heed the words of the apostle Paul, “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine...” (1 Timothy 4:6).

### **Endnotes**

1. Elisabeth Elliot, edited, *The Journals of Jim Elliot*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1978), p. 353
2. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (Harper, New York, 1971), p. 8



## **Helpful Links**

**www.cmml.us**  
**Christian Missions**  
**In Many Lands**

Service organization supporting  
American overseas missionaries

The following letter was circulated on the "prayer chain" in a local assembly recently. The husband, a professing believer, has become ensnared by the world and the flesh, and has left his family. His wife, a dear believer in the fellowship, has been steadfast, and sent out this note. There are a number of spiritual principles shining through this letter, and for that reason, we have decided (with permission) to share it with our readers as a reminder of how our local assembly fellowship becomes our spiritual family in the Lord. (Names have been changed). - Editor

To my church family;

First I want to thank each and every one of you for your prayers, your hugs, encouraging verses, listening ears, words of wisdom, but most of all your love to me and little Sara Lynn. This has been the worst time in my entire life, and yet I am thankful for it because of all the ways God has been teaching me.

Many of you have asked, "What can I do for you"? The only answer I have is, "Pray". And you guys have really been doing that. I am humbled thinking of how many people have reached out to me. I am a private person, and I have a difficult time letting people do things for me. This situation has taught me how much we all NEED each other. I am realizing just how

much of a spiritual battle a Christian marriage REALLY is. Without my friends and my family lifting me up in prayer, I don't know where I'd be.

At the first ladies' study this year it was said that we need to be valiant and vigilant for each other, fighting these spiritual battles together and FOR one another. I used to find reasons to miss assembly prayer meetings because I never understood the value they have. Now I can see the privilege it is to pray for each other. We love others by fighting their battles along side of them. And let's be honest, there are times we are too weak to fight for ourselves, we need the love and support of others to carry us. (Ecclesiastes4:9-12); (Ephesians 6:12)

All that being said, my heart has been burdened to fast for my husband and for my marriage. (all marriages in general really) This is usually a private thing between me and the Lord, but I wanted to extend an invitation to anyone willing and able to do this with me.

For all those who have asked, "What can I do for you" or who have said, "If there's anything I can do, let me know".....my answer has been, " There is not much anyone can practically do besides pray". But the Lord put it on my heart that fasting can be done as well. I do not EXPECT people to do this. But I wanted to put it out there for anyone

who might be burdened, and give you the opportunity to fight with me in this way. On Thursday, November 12th (this coming Thursday) I will be fasting. Anyone and everyone who wants to join me is welcome! No need to even tell me, your prayers are appreciated just the same!

A few specific requests are:

1. That God would expose the darkness in my husband's life with His Light.
2. That my husband's eyes would be opened and that he would see how the enemy has lied to and deceived him.
3. That the devil's plans for him would be thwarted and go no further.
4. That God will have victory in my marriage.

I am a tad uncomfortable sending this because like I said, I struggle asking for help or even allowing people to do ANYTHING for me. But I know that when someone I love is hurting, I want opportunities to do something for them. So I guess this invitation is for me, but also for you because I love you and I know you love me.

In Christian Love,  
Naomi



THE SMALL PRINT

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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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