



Editor's Note

This November ESN is the 6th and final issue for 2015. It has been a good year, and for me, much to learn about editing even a small publication! I thank the Lord for those who write, edit, publish, and translate the material that makes up ESN. Their work is an investment of precious time for eternity.

But there is another dimension to this effort, too. I'm thinking about those quiet folks who work behind the scenes, sometimes year after year in ways we don't often mention. At the top of the list would be the prayer partners, bringing the needs before the throne of grace. Others share financially to help with printing

and mailing costs. Then there are those who receive mailings of ESN, and distribute individual copies to subscribers within the local assembly. And I'm probably overlooking others who help, but there is One Who sees all, and made this promise: "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me to give every man according to his work." (Rev. 22:12).

We send this issue out with a prayer that the Lord may encourage and edify His people through these writings, and as 2015 goes "into the books," we are reminded that before the New Year comes in, the Lord Himself may come. Maranatha! - Jack Spender

Practical Ministry Inter-Assembly Fellowship

by Ed Anthony

In the previous article, we explored the importance of good stewardship within the local church as a responsibility of its elders. As a result of investigating that issue the question might be asked, How about the relationship between the local assemblies? If all are expressions of the whole should there be a stewardship of the fellowship between the assemblies?

This issue seems to have taken on additional significance today as there are some assemblies, for a variety of reasons, that struggle, many times as a result of a diminished number in fellowship. We have seen this happen because of the loss of employment with businesses moving out of an area, population shifts from one area to another, and shift in children not staying in the area where they grew up. Who is going to help these assemblies during their time of need? Should assemblies be helping one another?

In response, some will have a tendency to respond in extremes (as with many issues related to the Bible). Some will say that the Bible shows that the churches functioned autonomously and to protect that autonomy, assemblies should operate independently. Others will say having a central place to go to for help, as in Acts 15 at Jerusalem, should be the model for the assemblies. Not surprisingly, the biblical reality is in between.

Fellowship Based on the Head

The background to the issue is much greater than can be covered in this brief article. But our view on inter-assembly fellowship will be influenced by the historical issues encountered by the assemblies in relation to not having fellowship with that which would defile. As a result, men somehow determine which assemblies can be in fellowship together. This seems to be a misunderstanding of who the

Head is. Our fellowship with one another is not based on our view of an assembly but its connection and fellowship with the Head. If an assembly is in fellowship with the Head, then by its very nature those other assemblies connected to the Head are in fellowship with one another. What determines the sphere of fellowship is fellowship with the Head. That which is out of fellowship with the Head, for whatever reason, certainly would not be in fellowship with other assemblies in fellowship with the Head (Co. 2:19).

Thus assemblies are independent of each other, as far as the Head goes, as all are dependent on the same authority. Yet, they are interdependent as regards fellowship since all in fellowship with the Head are connected through Him. Since each assembly is guided by the same Head, you would expect some measure of similarity among them (1Co.4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1) – but that is determined by the Head. The relationship goes through the Head.

With that all too brief introduction in mind, it seems incumbent on assemblies to be of help to one another as with any individual believer (Ro. 12:5; Ep. 4:15) – because of the connection to the Head. Not for the purpose of making a federation of churches, but for edification of the body as a whole – being connected to the Head. The only Head for an assembly – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1-3 shows a good example of this where each assembly is connected to the Head and responsible to Him, yet all these churches would share the letter given, that together they might be edified and built up. It is the Lord who creates the extent of the interdependence, not man (Ep. 4:15-16). So an assembly cannot have any authority over another assembly as that is already established – the Lord Jesus Christ.

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The Jerusalem Council

Our brief consideration of leadership in Acts will conclude next issue with a look at chapter 20. In the present article, we will study the excellent example of good leadership in Acts 15, in confronting a difficult problem that the church was facing. As we have seen, the author Luke probably had no intention of being exhaustive in his treatment of church leadership, but God guided his choice of material so that careful study would reveal precious truths helpful to the church in all times.

In the interim between Paul's first and second missionary journeys, an incident occurred in the church at Antioch that required the careful but rapid attention of the apostles. It is a fine illustration of the value of, 'doing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done.'

The Problem Described

Simply stated, some men from the church in Jerusalem came to Antioch and promoted teachings that unsettled the believers. In modern terms, their argument would sound something like this: "Oh, it's very well to believe in Jesus and trust Him for your salvation, but just don't forget that the Law of Moses is also part of Scripture, and in order to be truly saved, you must also keep the law, including circumcision."

One can only imagine the impact of such teaching in a Gentile church! Gentiles of any nation could be saved, but first they must become Jewish proselytes or converts to Judaism. This surely sounds reasonable, but has dangerous implications. The gospel message of faith alone cannot then be correct, the works of law-keeping are required. No wonder the "contention" was strong, and a decision reached to consult with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

At this point, it will be helpful to remind present day elders of their God-given responsibility to "watch over the flock" (Acts 20:28-31), as false doctrines often enter the church through pious looking doors! Who could deny teaching from the "mother church" in Jerusalem? But it was not of God, and needed to be exposed. Delegates were sent, a council was convened, and the matter was considered.

The Conference in Jerusalem

In the following verses, several insights about leadership are noteworthy:

1. The references to "apostles and elders" signal a transition from the original 12 to the normal means of church oversight by elders. There is no attempt after Pentecost to preserve a ruling body of 12 by "apostolic succession." Elders would everywhere become the standard of church leadership in early Christian churches.
2. All attempts to elevate the church in Jerusalem to a centralized ruling body fall to pieces upon two considerations. For one thing, we are explicitly told that those who brought questionable teaching to Antioch came from the church in Jerusalem (15:24), and likely made reference to the apostles to gain authority. It is reasonable and commendable that the church in Antioch should send representatives to the source of the problem! Secondly, there is no indication that James was the 'Pastor' of the church in Jerusalem. It was fitting that deference and honor should be paid to those such as James who were close to the Lord Jesus, and who resided in Jerusalem. (See Acts 1:14 where Mary, the mother of Jesus is distinguished from the other women).
3. One cannot help but observe the strong involvement of the whole church, both at Antioch in sending the delegates, and in Jerusalem in receiving them and participating in the discussions and decisions that followed. Assemblies in which the elders act "behind closed doors" while the saints wait for official rulings, should weigh this section of Scripture carefully.
4. It is heartwarming that throughout their dealings with a serious doctrinal matter, those in leadership maintained a spirit of brotherly comradery and even took the opportunity to cause "great joy" along the way (15:3) as they shared the blessings of the gospel outreach with believers. Don't let necessary dealings with difficult matters rob the joy of the Lord's working!
5. Although agreement was not immediate, and required careful listening, sharing of testimony, appeal to Scripture and the summary conclusions of a respected brother, the end result had a unifying effect. The letter sent out is marked by such statements as: "having come to one accord," (literal text 15:25), and "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (15:28). It

sometimes requires great effort and forbearance to achieve unity, but it is a good work that will bring blessings to the church.

So far, the record is filled with evidence of diligent work, and a spirit of grace. The problem has been considered, much testimony given, and unity achieved by a conclusion which is both faithful to the Scriptures and relevant to the needs of the people. But there is one more important step to be taken, and we can learn from what follows.

The Importance of Clear Communication

Think for a moment of the outcome, had the council adjourned after James summarized the conclusion to which all had come. What strange interpretations might have filtered back to the church in Antioch? And what varied nuances from well-meaning attendees explaining what they thought they heard might have spread throughout the young churches in all the empire? Accuracy in hearing and reporting the truth is just one of the many ways in which sheep tend to go astray (Isa. 53:6).

Thus, James concluded his remarks by suggesting that a letter be written, and this was done. Further, the apostles, elders and the whole church agreed to send faithful messengers (vs. 22), who could give verbal affirmation to what was written in the letter (vs. 27). Elders should note this carefully. Some men are reluctant to commit things to writing, fearing that rules may encourage 'legalism.' But when dealing with critical matters capable of being misunderstood, such as fundamental doctrines of the faith, matters of public discipline, and the commendation of servants to the Lord's work, written communication can be a safeguard, and was the practice of the earliest Christians.

There is, in the letter sent, yet another heartwarming touch of good leadership that we should observe. Those who wrote the document were careful to avoid a critical spirit. Once again, we can think about what might have happened if the letter amounted to little more than a stern judgment; "This side is correct, and this side is in error." Instead, we note the gentleness, and the attempt to soften the impact of a difficult decision.

It is true that neither circumcision, nor any other good work is necessary for salvation, and on this point, the brethren did not waver. But they also respected the fact that many Jewish believers were involved in the

Studies in Acts—Part 7 (continued from page 2)

local assemblies, either through faith in Christ, or a relationship such as family or friends of the Christians. Thus the apostles and elders added some supportive words to the letter which would comfort those from a Jewish heritage. The thought seems to be as follows: "No, you do not need to be circumcised to be saved, but in love for the Lord and for your brothers, you ought to avoid practices which are sinful or offensive."

A Welcome Conclusion

What was the outcome of all this effort? The Spirit of God has preserved at least two results in order that we may be sure that the Lord was pleased. In 15:31-32, the assembly in Antioch, upon hearing the letter, "rejoiced for the comfort" that it brought. Some time later, as the decision became known throughout the region, we read that, "the churches were established in the faith and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5).

Would that these two conclusions could be written as a result of difficult decisions made by elders and spiritual leaders in the work of the Lord today. And why should we expect any less?



Inter-Assembly Fellowship (continued from page 1)

Practical Fellowship and Support

There are several ways we believe that assemblies can help one another, and especially help the smaller gatherings.

1. **Constancy.** Zeal for the local assembly should not cause neglect of the body as a whole. Recognize the connection between the assemblies by their connection to the Head – the Lord Jesus Christ. The assemblies were aware of one another and the actions of one were used as motivation for the others (2 Th. 1:4). They became examples for one another (2 Co. 8:1-2). Sending prayer lists and upcoming activity notices between assemblies can be helpful in this area.
2. **Care.** Have a daily care for the Lord's local manifestations of the one body – the local assemblies. Paul had a daily concern for "all" the assemblies – 2 Co. 11:28. Even at a distance, prayer, notes of encouragement, and offers of practical help can have a profound effect.
3. **Call.** Although phone calls can help, the idea of the word "call" in times past was to visit. How often a small work can be encouraged by those who are willing to go out of the way to visit (Ac. 15:36). Also, when traveling, try to find a local assembly to visit and be an encouragement.

4. **Closeness.** Use technology such as Skype to conduct Bible studies, prayer meetings, and the like with smaller groups. We have had several folks from small assemblies around the country attend a local Bible study by using online technologies to meet with us. This kind of technology can also be used to help assemblies that are looking for godly counsel concerning challenging issues.
5. **Concern.** Share in the needs of the assembly. The saints in Macedonia and Corinth helped the poor saints in Jerusalem during a famine. Interestingly, for Macedonia it was out of their own poverty – what an example! (Ac. 11:27-30; 1Co.16:1; 2Co. 8:1-2, 9; Ro.15).
6. **Community.** Sharing gift. Sometimes servants in one assembly can be of help to another in a practical way in the use of spiritual gift (Ac. 8:14-15; Ep. 4). This was evident in Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and even in Phebe (Ro. 16:1).
7. **Communion.** Ministering and fellowshiping together. We know of cases where two smaller assemblies gather at mid-week for Bible study and/or prayer. In another case we know of a group of assemblies who gather for a meal and pray for missionaries on a regular basis. We have

seen elders' breakfasts, conferences, picnics, ladies' and men's meetings, and gospel outreach that have encompassed many assemblies. Of course there must be care taken when dealing with pooled resources as this could be seen as compromising the individual assemblies' dependence on the Head, and might even introduce issues of authority.

Keep the Unity

We are part of the body together and yet at times we have seen the flesh enter. We have seen cases where assemblies at times seem to be in competition rather than working together for God's greater glory. A genuine concern for the local expressions of His body is essential. Keep the unity – do not establish another.

In summary we have been called out of the world but not out of the church. As we have seen, the scriptures are replete with examples of the interaction between churches to share letters, gifted individuals, gifts, etc., for the edification of the whole body. Though each assembly is in a way autonomous, each is dependent on the same Head, the Lord Jesus – which makes them related. God grant us wisdom and strength to be of help to one another as we continue our dependence on Him.



Helpful Links

Christian Worker's Fellowship www.christianworkersfellowship.org Practical fellowship with the Lord's servants at home

Wives' Corner

Discretion

by Stephanie Torres

As women, we appreciate beauty. And, if we are honest, on some level, we all desire to be beautiful. There is no greater embellishment, however, than a woman of sound character. Paul expresses this in Titus 2:10, when he exclaims, “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things”. In essence he is saying, lend beauty to the gospel by the way you live your life. Earlier in the chapter, he details some features of true femininity. One of these virtues is discretion. (Titus 2:5)

Discretion is synonymous with terms like restraint, self-control, discernment, and temperance. The Greek translation suggests a person who is of sound mind, and curbs her desires and impulses. A discreet woman is careful in speech, in behavior, in presentation, in decisions, in her interactions with others, and is careful with the intimacies of confidantes. Scripture gives us compelling examples of women who, when faced with even extreme circumstance, paused before they spoke or acted.

Mary, the mother of our Lord, when presented with the shepherd's tale, uttered not a word. “But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19) In the midst of overwhelming news, she chose restraint. I Samuel speaks of Abigail: “The woman was discerning.” Her evil husband, Nabal refused to aid David's men. Abigail did

not waste time berating her spouse. She controlled impulse. She moved intelligently and efficiently to remedy the situation, and David himself said of her, “Blessed be your discretion...” (25:33) In I Peter 3, it is the wife's temperance and godly behavior that ultimately wins over the heart of her wayward husband. Even our Savior, “opened not His mouth” in the face of trial. He arrested His liberty to speak in order to achieve a greater end. Such is the way of discretion.

As leaders' wives, what does the canvas of our character look like? It should be quite different from the indiscriminate and unbridled behavior that is encouraged in the world. A discreet woman exudes composure and control. When faced with information, are we able to discern what is to be shared and what is to be protected? When we respond to our husbands, are we thoughtful and deliberate? If we frequent social media sites, are we conservative in our communications?

When we correct our children, are we circumspect? Do we proceed in purposeful love and instruction or do we let them have the full weight of our feelings? When a saint is in error, do we proceed with love, gentleness, and delicacy? Are we able to quiet ourselves and allow another to lead a conversation, respecting their contributions? Or

must we ensure that our agenda is met? A mature Christian woman will not let her moods or feelings rule her. A discreet woman longs for her life to reflect the character of her Savior, quite aware that her self control, or lack of it, is making a statement regarding her dependency on God.

A woman of discretion is equally aware that as she endeavors to echo God's character, she has a captive audience. As we evaluate, adjust, and so often struggle to display this virtue, we are under surveillance. Younger women are watching, observing and looking with wonder at how we control and conduct ourselves in the midst of the demands of daily life. If discretion adorns the gospel, then the best way to teach discretion is to wear it. As you live it, others long for it and aspire to it.

Make no mistake, bearing the fruit of God's character involves labor and a painful dying to self, but this fruit is a beautiful presentation of femininity that is a convincing announcement of who God is. In a sense, discretion is an ornament of God with which we can decorate our lives and thus reflect His beauty.

“And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands...” Psalm 90:17 

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