



Editor's Note

This issue marks the completion of 10 years of publishing Elders' ShopNotes. What began as a follow up to elder training sessions in a few locations has grown to a considerable distribution.

We continue to embrace our original vision – to provide encouragement and practical teaching for elders who seek to

shepherd God's flock in the local church. We want to do this by providing concise, "bite-size" articles readily digestible for the average working elder whose time is at a premium.

Thank you to all who have helped make this possible through your prayers, encouragement and financial gifts. We praise God for every one of you.

Biblical Qualifications

Integrity (part 3)

by Chuck Gianotti

We continue to focus on one of the most important attributes in a leader—integrity, based on Psalm 15. One can never trust an elder if he cannot be sure the elder's words and actions are consistent with the real person inside. Without integrity nothing else has much substance. Integrity cannot be compartmentalized, it affects the whole person. It is a window into the soul. Lack of integrity in one area casts a shadow over the whole of a person's life.

This article looks at two more applications of integrity, which might, on first look, seem easy to implement.

Nor does evil to his neighbor (Ps 15:3b)

All would quickly assent that no Christian should engage in evil at all, calling to mind the seminal statements of our Lord, "Turn the other cheek" and "Love your enemies." The love chapter (1 Cor 13) adds that love is kind and does not act unbecomingly (vs. 4-5 NASB). Peter writes that our Lord, "... while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). Pretty straightforward, eh?

Why would this be uniquely important for elders to understand and embrace? Elders of all people are sometimes in the firing line, being the target of criticism and discontent. When things go wrong, often it is the elders who take the hit, as is true for leaders in most organizations. Satan would love to entice an elder into retaliating. This retaliation can be in either an aggressive or

a passive way. By passive, I refer to the subtle ways of penalizing people by using the elders' position to unjustly limit them or their ministries in some way. By active, I mean publicly or privately denouncing or criticizing in return.

I think of David who resisted pressure from his generals to punish Shimei who had cursed the king. His integrity is seen in

his response, "What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah? If he curses, and if the Lord has told him, 'Curse David,' then who shall say, 'Why have you done

David's trust in the Lord permeated him thoroughly even in the face of severe adversity.

so?" ...Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day." (2 Sa 16:10, 12). David's trust in the Lord permeated him thoroughly even in the face of severe adversity. His own reputation was not something he would take into his hand, foreshadowing our Lord Jesus' attitude on the cross. David really meant it when he said things like, "The Lord is my Shepherd," "He is my rock," "My fortress." To be sure these were all statements of faith, but integrity is demonstrated when beliefs stand true even when being insulted with cursing. Remember, integrity means "wholeness, singleness," that is, everything works consistently in a person's life. David was a man of wholeness, that is, a man of integrity, even in the most basic area of whether he would do evil in response to evil.

As elders we are on display, modeling Christ-like behavior. There is no place for false humility here, saying, "Don't look to me as an example, I'm just a sinner like

(Continued on page 4)

Leadership Principles

Elders: Active or Passive?

by Jack Spender

Not long ago, a man said something like this: "I enjoyed the ministry today, but one thing you said really caught my attention. It was the statement that there is an active as well as a passive side to the work of elders. I need to do some serious thinking about that, because . . . through most of my years I have been a passive elder."

I remember wondering how many other elders might feel the same way. Some will wonder that an article on such a subject could be needed at all. Isn't it obvious that both active (action) and passive (accepting) roles are involved in leading people? We might think so, but consider the following.

In many churches, one man is the picture of action and involvement. Preaching the Word, chairing committees, leading in visitation, in decision making, in outreach and a host of other activities, there is not much time for being passive about anything.

On the other hand, I have been told on several occasions by men who have been elders for years that the chief responsibility of any elder is stated in I Peter 5:3 namely, to be "examples to the flock." Presumably if an elder is a godly example, everything else will fall into place.

Clearly, all elders need to strive for balance in leading the church, but does that balance extend even to being more active or passive in how one leads?

The Need for Balance

It is quite apparent that people with widely different personalities can become effective leaders in society and in the church. Churches that depend on a plurality of brothers, a team approach to leadership, often observe an interesting mix of personality types in the group. Some are more outgoing and expressive; others are quieter and more reserved in their participation.

A quick check of Scripture passages relating to church leadership makes it clear that in some things elders must simply "be," and in other situations they must "do." In fact the passage from I Peter 5 cited for what elders must "be" begins with a charge

to "do" something: "The elders who are among you . . . feed the flock of God..." (I Peter 5:3,4). In I Timothy 3, Paul describes the qualities of an elder as both passive virtues such as "sober minded" or "patient," and with action words such as "given to hospitality" or "apt to teach." Without question, both aspects are important.

But suppose an assembly has leaders who all share the same personality type or approach to leading; that is, all find it easy to take an active role and initiate. Or on the other consider where all prefer to sit back and wait for change to come and others to function? Clearly, both of these present an imbalance. Are there realistic changes that could be made for the blessing of the church in order to prevent such imbalance in leadership?

Traits of Leaders

We should be clear that the subject of God-given personality is not a question of "right" vs. "wrong." God has made each servant of His a unique creation of infinite value to be appreciated. Any leadership team will find strength in the blend of its *personalities*. But one's approach to leading, that is, his leadership *style* is a different matter, and should be growing and improving throughout life.

On a well balanced team, the more active leader takes initiative, makes things happen, is not threatened by change or the need to deal with problems, and enjoys communicating. The passive leader takes a relaxed position, enjoys delegating tasks to others, is content to let change come naturally and enjoys listening to others.

The goal is to achieve a pleasing blend of action and acceptance so that all involved are respected and honored for their work, and that the church is healthy and able to accomplish its mission. In such a setting, people in the church enjoy the freedom to learn and grow without pressure. A study in the life of the Lord Jesus reveals His perfect balance in leading His disciples--as the apostle John put it, He was "full of grace and truth."

Problems and Dangers

While much could be written about the problems caused by a lack of balance in either direction, it is probably not an overstatement to say that more assemblies suffer from an overly passive leadership than one that is too active. Some leadership groups are plagued by a sort of spiritual inertia; no one wants to lead and things are not taken care of. In this sense, passivity is the path of least resistance. In time the church suffers and growth ceases.

Of course there are many factors that contribute to a languishing local church, but one of the most common is a lack of good leadership. The elders simply cannot or will not lead effectively. They cannot inspire and motivate the people. Decisions are inconsistent or not made at all. Time in leadership meetings is wasted, coordination of servants and ministries is weak, and problem issues remain unresolved.

The sad part is that all of this can be tolerated because it appears more spiritual to "just pray about it," "leave it with the Lord." What can a group of elders in this condition do?

Working Toward Balance

What an encouragement it is that with the Lord there is always hope! Probably the greatest hurdle is to admit that a problem exists. The decision to "turn around" and go in a new direction (called repentance in the Bible) can be the profound beginning of a whole new outlook in a fellowship. No question about it, change in these things will not be an easy road. Admitting weakness can be a foreboding thought to those who have long been recognized as leaders in the church.

But there is more incentive. With its team approach to leadership, New Testament assemblies are in a favorable position to involve people in the work of the ministry. Their involvement will provide support for their leaders who actively lead in the challenges that growth will inevitably bring. And how important that support is!

Feeding the flock, equipping the saints, making important decisions in a

Continued on page 3

The Sandpaper of God

by Mary Gianotti

Recently it was brought to my attention by someone who loves me very much that I had a less than gracious way of thinking about some difficulties in our fellowship. My first reaction was of course defensive. I was quick to justify my attitude. I argued that I couldn't help my reaction, it's my personality; I see right and wrong clearly and it needs to be stated that way; as a woman I just know how women think... In the end the Lord used a simple illustration to get my attention.

My husband makes beautiful furniture. One thing he always says is that the last touches are often what takes a piece from ordinary to being fine furniture.

In the process of making fine furniture there is a noticeable progression from raw lumber to the finished piece. Just when it looks finished the hard work begins, sanding. It requires tedious work going over and over the piece using different grades of sand paper. An

expert craftsman can detect the smallest spot that is not completely smooth. Multiple layers of wax are then rubbed. It is time consuming, requiring an expert eye and a lot of patience.

I don't know about you ladies but I don't want to be just an unfinished piece of God's furniture. The problem

Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:18

is that after being saved for many years, in my case fifty, it is easy to think we don't need to change. In the early years of our new life in Christ He did dramatic things. He took the raw wood and crafted us in Christ. We saw remarkable changes; habits and life patterns were transformed. Now, years later the Master Carpenter wants to begin the sanding.

In woodworking the craftsman begins with rough sand paper. As the wood smoothes he uses successively

less abrasive paper. Even after the finish is applied, there is rubbing with steel wool to remove the "nubs" resulting from dust settling on the wet finish. The beauty of wood and the design is brought out with each step.

I want to be aware of and yield to the Holy Spirit's work in my life, to have a willingness to make changes that will bring out the beauty of Christ Jesus's glory in me. In my case it was a "less than gracious way of thinking" that needed to be sanded off. I feel His rub in so many areas of my life. It may not be the hammer or the saw but the work is just as important.

"Lord help me to be aware of your sanding in my life. I don't want to reject the touches of your refining work. I desire to yield under your hand to become more like my Savior. Amen"

"Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Phil 1:6



Active or Passive (cont. from page 2)

timely manner and setting a godly example all result from a team effort. Therefore it is important that each elder be honest about his strengths and limitations, not forgetting that his fellow elders may have much needed insight on blind spots he himself cannot see. Open communication is crucial. If each man is willing to accept correction from his coworkers, and is determined to sharpen his leadership skills, the effect can be marked blessing and growth in the church.

Engaging The Elders

It would be especially helpful if the elders engaged in some frank discussion about this matter of active/passive leadership. Once again it must be emphasized that there is no reason to expect a man to be what he is not as to personality. Rather, each man must sense that the goal is to bring out the

best and fully utilize the strengths and gifts God has given to him. This process in turn will not only help the church, but will strengthen his marriage and his other relationships in all other aspects of life.

Perhaps some portion of the elders' meeting could be devoted to compiling an informal list of the things about which elders must provide active leadership, such as protecting the church from false teachers, dealing with needed discipline and restoration of sinning believers, providing nourishing spiritual food for the flock, visiting the sheep, and communicating a sense of vision as to what are the goals of the particular church.

Try to include some practical helps such as setting up simple measures for accountability. Taking and reviewing notes of meeting decisions, using email updates on progress during the week,

and periodic reviews through feedback from the saints are all ideas that some churches have found helpful in making sure that momentum is not lost.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Romans 12:11 best summarizes this subject as it can be applied to all believers, but especially to elders—they should be: "... fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The word "fervent" could be translated "boiling" and carries the thought of something that has been exposed to great heat. This links well with Paul's exhortation to Timothy to "stir up the gift of God which is in thee..." (II Tim. 1:6), as one would stir the coals of a dying fire into new life and warmth. One can only imagine what God can do in a church whose leaders are willing to move from their passive comfort zone into the active part of the battle!



Integrity (cont. from page 1)

everyone else.” Children look to parents as models to follow. Students look to teachers. And Christians look to their spiritual leaders as models.

Brothers, we must model integrity in how we respond to adversaries—not returning evil for evil. People are watching and learning from our behavior. Lack of robustness in our faith in the face of our detractors will cast a shadow on every other area of our ministries. People will have a growing sense that our faith doesn’t run very deep, despite our best efforts to give the appearance of faithfulness.

So elders need to nurture integrity in how we respond to people who stand against us. The next characteristic follows on this one.

Nor takes up a reproach against his friend (15:3c)

An illustration here will serve us well. I remember being with a very friendly person, gregarious and charismatic in personality. He was an elder in a church. Everyone responded positively to him—I was a bit envious of the ease with which he conversed with others and made them smile. As we were riding in a car, he stopped to talk through the window with an acquaintance, carrying on a jovial interaction. As we pulled away, he turned to me and began to speak of that acquaintance with acid sarcasm. It was a reproach behind that acquaintance’s back. From that point on, I found it difficult to believe his friendliness toward me or anyone else was genuine. He essentially

had taken up a reproach against a man whom he treated on the surface as a friend. How did I know he wasn’t doing the same thing to me behind my back. Lack of integrity, the dichotomy between what he was on the surface and what he was inside was glaring in this situation.

However, there is another way to look at this verse. To take up a reproach can also have the sense of attacking a person’s reputation. The worth of a man’s good name is important to him and it is a serious offense to take that away from him, no matter what justification one might consider for doing so.

As Matthew Henry says in his commentary, the man of Psalm 15, “... makes not others’ faults the subject of his common talk, much less of his sport and ridicule, nor speaks of them with pleasure, nor at all but for edification. He makes the best of everybody, and the worst of nobody. He does not *take up a reproach*, that is, he neither raises it nor receives it; he gives no credit nor countenance to a calumny, but frowns upon a backbiting tongue, and so silences it.”

When people know that an elder will guard their reputation and good name, they will trust him with other areas of their life. If a man will guard what he says about another’s reputation and name when that person is not present, then I can trust that he will likewise guard my reputation and name. This tells me the person is a man of integrity and I can trust him in

other areas of my life.

A godly man of integrity is one who, then, does not do evil to those around him and does not take up a reproach against them—this is consistent with the outworking of his faith and trust in the Lord. And when others see this in an elder, they are willing to trust him as he leads and ministers to them in the church.



From the Q-File

You never really learn much from hearing yourself talk. George Clooney

When you confront a problem you begin to solve it. Rudy Giuliani

It only takes 20 years for an enthusiastic, authentic, creative follower of Jesus Christ to become a foot-dragging, “pull the wagons in a circle” traditionalist. Anonymous

He led them to the right of the dancing trees—whether they were dancing nobody knew, for Lucy had her eyes on the Lion and the rest had their eyes on Lucy. C.S. Lewis, “Prince Caspian”

Lead, follow ... or get off the tracks. Howard Hendricks

The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on. Walt Lippman in “Roosevelt Has Gone.”

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