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Inside this Issue
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The Church – its Nurture
Page 1

What does God know?
Page 4

Ancient wisdom for a modern world
Page 8

All articles written by the Editor unless otherwise specified

Behaving ourselves in the house of God

Timeless truths about the local assembly

The Church – its nurture

‘God is not the author of confusion but of peace’ - ‘Let everything be done decently and in order’ are instructions from God to an assembly of Christians, 1 Cor. 14. 33, 40, and so to all His assemblies. We can well imagine, then, that He would not want assemblies of believers to be leaderless and out of control. In Acts 19 we saw what a leaderless assembly can be like, and it is not a pretty picture. How did the first Christians meet and what has God said about leadership in His assemblies?

The apostle Paul was probably the first Christian preacher to reach the city of Ephesus. He and his companions arrived there and preached for a number of years, and many were saved, baptized and gathered together as an assembly of believers. Eventually Paul moved on and many years later, on one of his journeys past Ephesus, called the elders of the assembly in Ephesus to come to the port where his ship had docked so that he could see them one last time and say to them, ‘Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood’, Acts 20. 28, 29.



YPS
(Young Precious Seed)
is a supplement of *Precious Seed* designed for young believers. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live.

Elders are shepherds

Paul here likens a Christian assembly to a flock of sheep, God’s sheep. The Lord Jesus Himself spoke of His people as sheep. ‘Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring’, John 10. 16. To His people, He is the Good Shepherd, John 10. 11, and the Great Shepherd, Heb. 13. 20. Now that He has returned to heaven He has left elders to be under-shepherds of His sheep. Paul tells elders that they are to ‘feed’ the assembly of God. The word is to ‘shepherd’, Acts 20. 28. Peter tells elders to ‘feed the flock of God’, 1 Pet. 5. 1-2. Again the word ‘feed’ means ‘shepherd’. Elders are to be shepherds, whilst Christ Himself is the Chief Shepherd, 1 Pet. 5. 4.



The Church – its Nurture

Elders are overseers

Looking at Acts 20 again, we discover two words used to describe elders. Paul 'called the elders (*presbuteroi*) of the church and . . . said unto them, Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers' (*episcopoi*), Acts 20. 17 with 28. Notice that the elders are overseers, for Paul called the *presbuteroi* and said, 'God hath made you *episcopoi*'. From these two Greek words we get the English words presbyterian (having to do with elders) and episcopalian (having to do with bishops). Here in Acts 20 the word *episcopoi* is translated 'overseers', but in 1 Timothy 3 the same word is translated 'bishop'. The two words come together again in Titus 1 where we read that Titus had been instructed by Paul to ordain elders in every city in Crete. These elders (*presbuteroi*) had to be 'the husband of one wife, having faithful children . . . for a bishop (*episcopos*) must be blameless as the steward of God', v. 5 with v. 7. According to the New Testament, then, the elders are the overseers/bishops. A local church should not have elders and, above them in authority, a bishop or bishops. The elders are the 'bishops'.

Why then does the Bible use these two words, if they are not two different offices held by different men? The two words actually describe different aspects of the same thing. The word 'elder' refers to experience in the things of God. An elder need not be an old man in terms of age, but he ought to be old or mature in terms of Christian experience. This is emphasized in 1 Timothy 3. 6 where Paul says of an elder that he must not be a novice, lest he be lifted (puffed) up with pride. The word 'overseer', however, refers to the responsibility the elder must take. He must 'oversee'. He must take care of the flock, look after the assembly, and

ensure that all things are done decently and in order. Peter brings it all together well when he writes, 'The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder . . . Feed (shepherd) the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof (acting as overseers/bishops)', 1 Pet. 5. 1.

Elders are local shepherds and overseers

In New Testament times the pattern seems to have been that, in each local assembly, there was more than one elder, James 5. 14; Acts 20. 17; Tit. 1. 5. An important distinction needs to be made here between the local church and the universal church. The universal church is made up of all God's spiritual children, all those truly born again of the Spirit of God over the thousands of years from the Day of Pentecost when the church first began, Acts 2, right up to the day when the Lord will appear to take away His people, 1 Thess. 4. This vast gathering-together of God's children consists of all true believers from every century, every continent, and every denomination. It is made up of believers now dead ('with the Lord' in heaven), of believers now saved and still alive on earth, and of those who are not yet saved but who will be before the Lord comes. This universal church has never yet met in its entirety, because all of God's people are not in heaven yet. What a thrilling moment that will be when, for the first time ever, the whole church of God is gathered around the throne of God and of the Lamb in heaven! When our Lord said, 'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' He spoke of the assembly/church in the singular – and has in mind the universal church. It is this same universal church that is in view when we read that Christ 'is the head of the body, the church', Col. 1. 18, and that God 'made him to be head over



all things to the church which is his body', Eph. 1. 22, 23. Only the apostles, the twelve plus Paul, had authority to lay down doctrine and establish practice in this universal church which, as the household of God, is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles', Eph. 2. 20. The apostles had the right to take care of many assemblies of Christians because they had an unique authority from God. Yet once these apostles died no one took their place or exercised their authority. We do not see a Timothy, or a Titus, young men closely associated with the apostle Paul, acting as apostles. The only One who moves among the candlesticks in the book of the Revelation (and the seven candlesticks are seven assemblies), and has authority over them all, is the Lord Himself.

There are many scriptures, however, that speak of local churches/ assemblies. Paul writes to the 'assembly of God which is at Corinth', 1 Cor. 1. 2. He writes to 'the assembly of the Thessalonians', 1 Thess. 1. 1, sends greetings through Philemon to the 'church that is in thy house', Philm. 2, and in the book of Revelation the Lord writes letters to seven different assemblies, one in Ephesus, one in Sardis, Philadelphia, etc., Rev 2 and 3. Now these assemblies are local assemblies in that, firstly, the members lived locally and, secondly, it is impossible for every believer in the history of the church to be a member of that local assembly. I may be a member of an assembly that meets in the city of Bath, but I am not also a member of an assembly that meets in Brisbane, because I live in Bath, not Brisbane.

It would appear, too, that each local assembly was autonomous, which means it was overseen by its own elders. Elders of one assembly have no authority over another. This means that any attempt to make regional and

national bodies of elders is to go contrary to the teaching of scripture. So, also, is the idea that some 'full-time' preachers have of trying to control the assemblies in their area or amongst which they move. They may advise and teach, but they must not dictate. The Victorian concept of a senior-missionary in an overseas country is also un-biblical, especially if it leads to interference in local assemblies where that missionary is not in fellowship. In fact, anyone who tries to exercise authority over and beyond his own authority as an elder in the assembly in which he is in fellowship needs to justify his actions from scripture. Such attempts often smack of misuse of authority and are to be deplored.

Elders are local shepherds and overseers who should be honoured for their work

What are elders to expect from the sheep in the flock of God? The Scripture is quite clear what our attitude to elders should be. We are to 'know (recognize) them' and 'esteem (honour) them very highly in love for their work's sake', 1 Thess. 5. 12, 13, 'obey them' and 'submit' to them, Heb. 13. 17, 'receive not an accusation' against them without clear evidence (trust them), 1 Tim. 5. 19, and remember them, Heb. 13. 7. In other words, we are not to be overly critical of them, disrespectful, disobedient, or dismissive. But what if they are wrong? God knows that better than you or I do, and we must pray that He will change them, if they are wrong, or change us if they are not. Elders are in the assembly as God's under-shepherds, and any hand raised against an elder of an assembly is a hand raised against the authority of the One he represents. Their task is difficult enough - do you make it easier or more difficult? The Chief Shepherd is watching.



Your God is too small! Essential truths

What does God know?

Though God is spirit and does not have a body as we do, He is a living spirit who can see and hear, (*What does God look like?*). As spirit being God is not bound to any particular place at a particular time. He is omnipresent (*Where does God live?*). From these two truths it is not hard to arrive at the conclusion that He must therefore see and know everything. Is this what the Bible teaches? Yes; in terms of witnessing all that goes on in His creation, 'all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do', Heb. 4. 13. 'The Lord looks from heaven; he beholds all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looks upon all the inhabitants of the earth; he ... considers all their works', Ps. 33. 13-14. This everywhere-present God is an all-knowing, all-seeing God over whose eyes none can pull the wool.

God knows the things we do

David had a deep sense of this when he wrote that God knows 'my downsitting and my uprising', Ps. 139. To think that God even knows such humdrum, mundane things as that! Many over the years have either overlooked or forgotten this. Cain killed and buried his brother, no doubt thinking that committing murder in a field meant he was unobserved. Yet God had seen it all,

Gen. 4. 8-10. David committed adultery with Bathsheba. In order to cover his tracks when he learned she was pregnant with his child he brought her husband home from battle for a weekend. When that did not work, David arranged for him to be killed in battle, and then married Bathsheba, no doubt thinking no-one would find him out. Yet 'the thing that David had done displeased

the Lord', and God sent Nathan the prophet to accuse David, 2 Sam. 12. 1-9. God knew that Jonah had rebelled against Him and was hiding in the hold of a ship, Jonah 1. Thieves break into houses under cover of darkness or when they think no-one is watching. 'Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil', yet 'even darkness hideth not from thee', Ps. 139. 12. God is the Great Witness to all sin; there is nothing that passes Him by. He sees it all, for 'the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth', 2 Chr. 16. 9; 'the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good', Prov. 15. 3.

God knows the things we say

Again, David writes, 'there is not a word in my tongue but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether', Ps. 139. 4. Sarai, laughed when God said she would expect a child in her nineties, and God heard. 'Wherefore did Sarah laugh?' He asked, Gen. 18. 12-15. God heard and was displeased when false prophets claimed to speak with His authority and in His name. 'They have spoken lying words in my name', He said, Jer. 29. 23. God heard Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to Peter, Acts 5. 4. He even hears every idle word that we say, for which one day we will have to account.

God knows the things we think

'Thou understandest my thought afar off', says David, Ps. 139. 2. Yes, God 'understandeth all the imaginations of the heart', 1 Chr. 28. 9. Samuel fell into the trap of deciding a family of strong, sturdy young men were suitable for the task of being kings by looking at their faces. God told him he was wrong. 'Man looks on the outward things, but God looks on the heart', 1 Sam. 16. 7. And what does God see in the hearts of men



s about the attributes of God

and women? 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart ... even to give to every man according to his ways', Jer. 17. 10. 'God saw that the wickedness of man was great and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually', Gen. 6. 5. No doubt Simon the Pharisee was astounded when the Lord answered his thoughts, Luke 7. 39. The Lord did not commit himself to men because He knew what was in man. 'God knows your hearts', Luke 16. 15. He even knows our motives, Matt. 6. 1-5. 'He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastises the heathen, shall he not correct? He that teaches man knowledge, shall he not know? The Lord knows the thoughts of man that they are vanity', Ps. 94. 9-11.

God knows the things we dream

Daniel was put on the spot when King Nebuchadnezzar insisted on his dreams being interpreted, but had forgotten what he had dreamt. None of the astrologers and wise men of the day could tell him that, but Daniel stood before him and said, 'There is a God in heaven that reveals secrets', Dan. 2. 28, and so he was able to tell Nebuchadnezzar what he had dreamt and what it meant.

God knows insignificant things

We must not think that God misses anything. Even the mundane, unimportant things that happen around us are known and seen by God. 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing. Yet one of them shall not fall to the ground without your father', Matt. 10. 29. He even knows the number of

hairs there are on our heads, Matt. 10. 30. He knows our lives so intimately that He knows the things we need before ever we ask Him for them, Matt. 6. 8. He even knows the names of all the stars, Ps. 147. 4.



God knows possibilities

Does God even know what might have happened? Strange to say, He does. David asked God whether Saul would come to attack him at Keilah and God said, Yes. David then asked God whether the men of Keilah, with whom David had sought refuge, would hand him over to Saul and God again said, Yes. So David escaped from Keilah. 1 Sam. 23. 9-13. The Lord also challenged the people of His day, saying that if the miracles they had seen had been done in Sodom God would not have had to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because they would have repented, Matt. 11. 20-24, note also God's words in 2 Kings. 13. 19.

God knows the future

God knows and sees the development of a child in its mother's womb before ever it is born. 'My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret and curiously wrought in the lowest part of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance yet being unperfect and in thy book were all my members written ... when as yet there were none of them', Ps. 139. 15-16. He is the only One who can confidently declare what is going to happen in the future. He is God who can declare 'the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand and I will do all my good pleasure', Isa. 46. 10. 'Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them', Isa. 42. 9.

What does God know??

One of the hallmarks of a properly-commissioned prophet of God was that he would tell the people what was going to happen and it would happen precisely as he said. 'When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken', Deut. 18. 22. This is because only God knows the future.

God knows Himself

He is infinite in His being, yet He understands Himself therefore He knows the infinite and His knowledge is therefore infinite. No man could ever understand or know God; yet the Spirit knows, 1 Cor. 2. 10-11.

God knows secret things

God has revealed a vast amount to mankind; things about the creation and history of the world in which we live, His eternal purposes and plans, and what the future holds. Yet there is much that God has not revealed to us. 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God', Deut. 29. 29. And this means not just the plans He has which He chooses not to reveal to us, but also the secrets of our own hearts, and one day He will 'bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart', 1 Cor. 4. 5.

Knowledge of the Holy, p83). It is wisdom that enables God (and occasionally mankind) to take knowledge and use it properly for the best result. And God's wisdom is vast. He is 'the only wise God', Rom. 16. 27. 'With him are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding', Job 12. 13.

God has never learned anything

The extent of God's knowledge is fabulous. 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it', Ps. 139. 6. It is all the more incredible to think, too, that God has never had to learn anything. God never went to school, nor sat down to learn from even the mightiest archangel. His knowledge has never been acquired. No-one ever taught Him anything He did not know. 'Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel and who instructed him and taught him in the path of judgement and taught him knowledge and shewed him the way of understanding?', Isa. 40. 13-14. God puts Job in his place when He says to him, 'Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?' Job 37. 4. The believer is forced to cry out, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?' Rom. 11. 34. Because God's infinite knowledge is inherently and intrinsically His, He is never taken by surprise, never caught out.

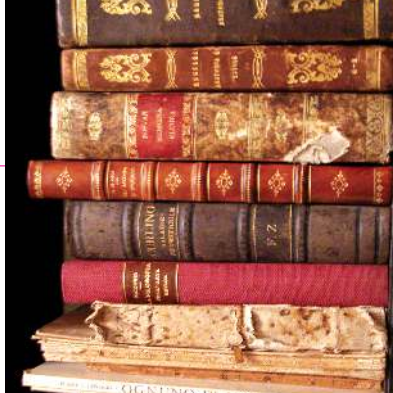
All of these truths above teach us how vast and fathom-less is God's knowledge of everything that is going on in His universe. He knows everything, 1 John 3. 20. Yet there is another aspect of God's omniscience and that is that He is totally wise. Wisdom is the perfect application of knowledge. 'Wisdom is the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means', (Tozer, The

Think, then, of the futility of trying to hide anything from God. Are we afraid to confess our sin to Him, in case He is angry with us? Why should we be? He knows our sin anyway, and knows more



about it than we know ourselves. In confessing sin to God we are not going to tell Him anything He does not know. Why then does God want us to confess our sin to Him? Because the act of confession shows us, and God, that we are aware of our sins, are prepared to acknowledge them and to put things right with Him. God's comprehensive knowledge of us should also remind us that, in a day of judgement to come, we will not be able to hide behind anything. All things are known by God and all things must be judged. He is the Great Witness of all sin. God's total knowledge of everything, including the future, should also encourage us to trust Him. There are many who claim to be able to foretell or predict the future. Most are charlatans. Yet God's track record on this one is impressive: everything He has in the past predicted would happen actually did. He knows the future. Trust Him. He will care for you.

But there is another thing about the knowledge of God. Psalm 1 tells us 'the Lord knows the way of the righteous.' Does that mean He does not know the way of the ungodly? Of course not. 'The way of the ungodly shall perish', and God knows it. Yet God's knowledge of the way of the righteous is a special, loving knowledge. God could say of His earthly people the Jews, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth', Amos 3. 2. Does that mean God did not know the others, the Philistines, the Amalekites, the Assyrians? No it does not. He knew them and their ways, which is why He judged them for their sin. Yet God's knowledge of His people is a special knowledge, a loving knowledge. So Job could say, 'He knows the way I take; when He has tried me I shall come forth as gold', Job 23. 10. God's knowledge of Job was a loving knowledge. Yes, God knows and sees all you do. To those who are not His own, this should come as a shock, a reminder



to put things right with Him now. To those who are His own, this should be a comfort and an encouragement. His eye upon the believer is a loving eye; His knowledge is a loving knowledge.

There is yet one thing more. God's knowledge of everything that happens in His universe is all-encompassing. Nothing passes Him by. His knowledge and wisdom is absolute and perfect. It is also 'intuited', or 'unlearned.' This was so of His Son who, when He came to this earth and became man, never ceased to be God and therefore was possessed of all knowledge and wisdom at all times. Yet, in becoming man, He began to learn things He had never known or experienced before. He learned how it felt to be hungry, to be thirsty, to be tired. He knew what it was like to be homeless and friendless. He learned what it was like to be tempted by Satan. This is not to say He ever yielded to temptation, nor yet that He could ever have yielded, for we do not believe that was possible. Yet He knew what it was like to face the temptations of the devil in all the frailties of human flesh. And He 'learned obedience by the things that he suffered', Heb. 5. 8. This does not mean He learned how to be obedient. It means He learned what total obedience involved – suffering, shame and scorn. To think the Son of God came into this world and learned such things. Why? So that He could be a perfect high priest, sympathetic to the feelings of His own, and a perfect example to us. Why did the Omniscient learn? Because He loved us. How much we owe Him in return!

GOD IS OMNISCIENT

**If Christ be God
and gave Himself
for me,
then no sacrifice
can be too great
for me to make
for Him.**

C. T. Studd
English Test Cricketer
and Missionary

Ancient Wisdom for a Modern World



Wise words from the book of Proverbs

As a door turns upon its hinges, so does a sluggard upon his bed, Prov. 26. 14.

The sluggard in the Bible is a tragic-comic character, one who is lazy to the point of ridicule and full of excuses, many of them feeble. 'I can't plough today because it is too cold. I can't go outside because there may be a lion in the streets, or I may be murdered on the way to work', Prov. 20. 4; 22. 13. He is bone idle, preferring indolence to hard work. 'Just a little slumber, a little sleep, a little folding of the hands to sleep', Prov. 6. 10. He buries his hand in a dish of food but is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth, Prov. 26. 15. He is irresponsible, easily diverted, an unreliable messenger, the sort of person you would not trust with an important errand. 'As vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him', Prov. 10. 26.

The picture of the slothful, lazy person turning upon his bed like a door on its hinges and unable to get up is comical. It reminds us that with some lazy people there can be a lot of activity but no progress –tossing and turning on a bed but not getting anywhere, for instance. Yet the picture is not only of one who is too idle to do anything. It is more of one who is full of excuses and reasons why a task should be done tomorrow, not today. The resulting failure in business or in private life comes gradually little by little. In this way the sluggard is the poorer because of wasted opportunities, lack of drive and purpose.

The example of the sluggard is given to remind us not to put off important things in life just because we can't be bothered. How often, for instance, have we been meaning to put things right with someone but have neglected to do so, to write that letter to a friend, to pick up that phone, yet the weeks go by. More importantly, for how long have you been meaning to put things right with God and you still haven't? 'Oh, tomorrow will do', 'I haven't time just now'. Well? Will you be finally caught unprepared to meet God because of feeble excuses and lack of drive? The old saying 'procrastination is the thief of time' is quite true, but time is not all it deprives us of.

'I went by the field of the slothful And lo, it was all overgrown with thorns; and nettles had covered the face thereof and the stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction', Prov. 24. 30-31. If that field is a picture of your spiritual life, fruitfulness and relationship with God, Isa. 5. 1-7 what does it look like today?

