



Exemplariness OF CHURCH LEADERS

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All the leadership training available today cannot produce exemplary church leaders. All the years of leadership experience in social, commercial, political, government and other secular institutions cannot make spiritual leaders out of men. The church is a spiritual institution which cannot be run like a secular organisation. The church exists to glorify God in all matters and to fulfil all His will concerning her. Her aim is not material gain or earthly powers and glory, but salvation, sanctity and spiritual maturity of people whom the Lord Jesus

Christ adds to the church, that they may be ready for His second coming. In order to guide the church to achieve her spiritual goals, men of exemplary spiritual life are needed.

Need for Leaders' Spiritual Example

A most challenging and crucial task of a godly church leadership is to lead the church biblically, even through the worst of times. In our day and age, an unprecedented attack is now being waged against the authority of God's Word. To

every discerning mind, it is absolutely clear that a spiritual revolt against God's divine authority is underway under the banners of "pragmatism", "relativism", "political correctness", "one-world religion", "alternative lifestyle", etc. These are seen not only without the church, but also within. The disintegration of moral values and the demise of doctrinal purity that are seen within the churches today are really a warning to us. Undoubtedly, the leadership of our church today must be prepared to face these powerful wicked forces that could so easily infiltrate into our congregation.

For that, we need "spiritual leaders", not mere leaders. A leader's spirituality begins with his own devotion to sound doctrines of the Bible and godly living. There is no room for lacklustre attitude towards one's own personal purity. As Paul wrote to Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16). Without a keen interest in personal and congregational purity, no one can be a God-honouring leader of the church. Churches of our day have no lack of leaders, but many are not necessarily "spiritual leaders", nor are they exemplary. Indeed, many of such so-called church leaders are in danger of God's condemnation, as sounded out by the prophet Jeremiah – "For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered" (Jeremiah 10:21)!

Pattern for Believers to Follow

In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul exhorted Timothy to be exemplary in six areas of his spiritual life, which are pertinent to proper church leadership – "Let no man

despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." The life of a leader of God's people must reflect godliness. He must be an "example". In Greek, it means "model" or "pattern". An artist uses a model so that he may be able to reproduce it in the style of his work. A tailor will normally lay a pattern on top of the material and cut the material to match the pattern. Likewise, a leader's life sets an example for the people of God to follow. Indeed, the pastor's life is his most powerful sermon!

Paul cultivated a life that was godly, thus he could tell others to follow his life pattern. He wrote to the Corinthian church: "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (1 Corinthians 4:16); "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1; cf. Philippians 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6). Likewise, to the Thessalonian church, he unashamedly declared, "For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us" (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

Exemplariness in Six Choice Areas of Godliness

We shall now briefly look at the six areas of a leader's spiritual life, which he must pay close attention to.

In Word

Firstly, the speech and discourse of a spiritual leader is to be exemplary. His words and attitude in speech must be worthy of

praise. This is significant because our Lord has said that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34b). He also in no uncertain terms warned: “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:37). A leader must guard his mouth from falsehood (cf. Ephesians 4:25). Truly, “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4). The credibility of a pastor will be greatly destroyed when people start comparing the contradicting things he, as a leader, has been telling people.

Moreover, a leader’s speech must be “alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6). His speech must not be ungracious. Certainly, righteous anger has its place, but no place should be given to the sin of anger. As is exhorted by Paul, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). It would be very shocking to hear someone, who is called into the full-time ministry, relating dirty jokes and filthy stories. That would surely reveal a dirty heart!

In Conversation

The word “conversation” here means conduct and is used to denote one’s way of life. A leader’s conduct must be built upon biblical principles. He must be a model of biblical living. The books you read, the shows / films you watch, your appearance, the places you go to, the things you possess, the activities you participate in, and all the rest must be a pattern for others to follow.

A leader ought never to adopt a lifestyle that people should not practise. Many church leaders mimic the world’s pattern of

life. They live like the world. Many do very little to build up their own devotional and spiritual lives, and those of their families. Leaders’ families are suffering spiritually, and some are even disintegrating as they (like the world) try to build up their financial security by getting their spouses to work outside and neglecting the time and energy needed in cultivating the godliness of their families. Many churches seem to be altogether unaware of the resultant degeneration of the families. Oh, as the prophet Hosea lamented, “like people, like priest” (Hosea 4:9)!

In Charity

The word “charity” translates the Greek word (*agape*) meaning “love”. A leader must constantly strive to be loving. It does not mean that he has to put up with and tolerate everything without discernment. Love is not just emotion and words. It is action. Love is best expressed through service. This is manifestly demonstrated through the testimony of Paul’s loving service, as depicted in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12. “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”

In Spirit

A leader, all the more a pastor, must exhibit the control, leading and filling of the Holy Spirit in his life. Every servant of God must seek “to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). This is also reiterated by Paul in Galatians 5:25 – “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” Paul further emphasised a similar thought in 2 Timothy 1:7-8 when he admonished Timothy, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God”.

In Faith

In Greek, this word can mean “faithfulness”. One must be loyal to the doctrines of God’s Word. There must be consistency in the leader’s teaching and preaching. Paul expressly pointed out regarding “the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” that “moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). In this respect, it is noted that Paul had a number of co-workers who remained faithful and were exemplary “in faith”. Epaphras (cf. Colossians 1:7) and Tychicus (cf. Colossians 4:7) were two such sterling examples.

In Purity

The Greek word used here (*hagneia*) refers not only to sexual chastity, but also the intents of the heart. When one’s heart is pure, one’s behaviour will also be pure. “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21). An exemplary leadership is one that is committed to godliness of themselves and the congregation, that God may take good pleasure to use that particular church as a sanctified vessel for His glory.

Conclusion

When an elder or a deacon is exemplary “in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”, he will become effective and fruitful in his work. He will not grow weary when the work is very difficult and demanding; nor will he adopt a casual and sloppy attitude towards his work simply because it is a small or familiar one. On the contrary, he will “bend over” it, throwing his heart and soul into it, whether it be great or small. He knows half-hearted work will bring no real advancement. Such exemplary church leaders know that they shall reap real rewards if they throw themselves unreservedly to the work that God has entrusted them with, and will thus be “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, ... know(ing) that (their) labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

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