

Healthy and Fruitful Leadership ¹

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(This is Part 1 of a 4-part series)

Healthy and Fruitful Leadership from 1 Timothy

Most people would agree that there are few things as important or critical to an organisation or nation, as leadership. I believe this is doubly so, when it comes to the leadership of the church. Because of that, the model and shape of leadership in the church is one of the practices the church cannot adopt uncritically from the world. This is because the grain of the church is against the grain of the world – God’s people in the Old and New Testament period are to be distinct, different, healthy and wholesome, in other words holy, as God is holy. As such, those who lead God’s people are to do so in a distinct manner that is consistent with the plan, purposes and character of the God who has revealed himself in the crucified Christ. There were other models of leadership in the ancient world; the Caesars, the Herods, the Pharisees and Sadducees, but Jesus embodied and called the first generation of Christian leaders to lead to the beat of a different drum.

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

Luke 22:24-27

Ironically, at the meal that symbolised the Lord Jesus’ giving of himself as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of the disciples’ sin, these all too human men break out in a chest-beating exercise debating which of them was the greatest. This, says Jesus, is adopting worldly, Gentile thinking about leadership. Jesus pointed out, hours before his betrayal and their denial or desertion, that he was a different sort of leader, a servant leader, who led by serving and who served by dying for their sins.

Paul, in what was possibly his last letter to a church, used the example of Jesus the servant king, to gently rebuke and correct those at Philippi who were acting out of selfish ambition and vain conceit – Phil.2:5-8.

¹ While hopefully these words and resources may prove useful to others, my primary focus and audience is the Presbyterian Church of Australia and particularly the Presbyterian Church in Queensland, of which I am its servant. It would be helpful to be forthcoming as to the attitude I have towards my denomination: ‘I love it’. This is over and against being either a pessimist or an optimist about this wonderful appendage of the body of Christ. The pessimist only criticizes and rebukes but does not love; his words are not ‘for her best’. The optimist sees the church through rose-coloured glasses; all is beautiful and even the church’s ugly blemishes are praiseworthy, but praise without standards is mere indulgence – he lacks courage. The lover looks and sees the faults and admits that they too share in them and possibly has contributed to them, but loves enough to ‘truth in love’ – this is the posture of all Christian leadership, to courageously love.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Christ Jesus, expressed the very nature of God by using his nature, as equal with God, for others in humble servanthood, and became the model for loving servanthood for all his followers, but especially the leaders of his people.

I believe the church, and particularly our own Presbyterian denomination, needs to be recaptured by the vision of this Jesus who, as the image of the invisible God, is also the servant king, who conquers by grace, mercy, love and obedience to death, even death on a cross. In doing this we must critique and reject the world's concepts of power and wisdom in favour of God's; that is, if we are to be leaders who also lead according to the pattern of Christ-like leadership.

I plan on initially framing this discussion on healthy and fruitful leadership by thinking through 1 Timothy 3 and the qualifications of the overseer (episkopos), as a way of exploring Paul's three interconnected links for qualified Christian leadership:

Link 1 - Submission to Christ-The 'Household' of the Self v1-7

Link 2 - The Competent Rule of the Overseer's Household-

Exploring the Nature of the First Century Household v4,5

Link 3 - Care of God's Church-God's Household v15.

These interconnected links make a chain of leadership for the church that is healthy and fruitful; disconnect any links and it produces weakness, inconsistency and ineffectiveness.

In my opinion, we have done a reasonable job at educating for preaching and teaching through our colleges but have significantly failed to ensure the requirements of:

- Submission to Christ – The 'Household' of the Self and
- The Competent Rule of the Overseer's Household -Exploring the Nature of First Century Household

Forty-three years on from Church Union we can be thankful to God for many blessings but in this present difficult hour, and which hour is not difficult, we need to be self-aware of our blessings and failures and adopt practices suited to this time of challenge. Leadership is a critical contributor to a healthy and fruitful future for our denomination.

In the rest of this paper, I wish by way of introduction, to look at one crucial element of Paul's teaching about the foundation of his own life and leadership.

The Christ-Driven Life 1 Timothy 1:15-17

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ

Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

Paul, in this passage urges Timothy to ensure that the followers of Christ in Ephesus all embrace the reality that they are sinners in need of Christ Jesus' saving work. Christ Jesus was motivated by their desperate need. Acceptance of this trustworthy saying is fundamental for healthy, fruitful Christian living. For Paul, God's love of the sinner is no mere theological 'shibboleth'; it is a deeply personal truth that defined Paul as well as motivating him. Paul in fact, describes himself as the test case of just how great God's patience truly is. If Paul, through Christ, can be saved and receive eternal life then, those of a tender conscience can take heart that when they take hold of Christ they will be saved in turn.

This is the motivating experience of change, and that fuelled transformation in Paul's life and must be the motivation for transformation in every leader's life in the church. The healthy awareness of ourselves as sinners who are loved in Christ, brings humility not humiliation, and out of that comes a willingness and a desire to submit to the rule of Christ in our life, which is articulated in 1 Timothy 3. This is the foundation stone of Christian leadership. The cross is the safest place on earth to do the most unsafe thing on earth that is necessary for every Christian leader; to understand how sin and sinful strategies have worked in their life and submit to the heart surgeon's knife while fully awake, so as to give the Spirit assistance.

Transformation, the bringing of our life under the rule of Christ Jesus is not mere morality. It is dying to self and living to God in Christ, and enables us to lead with integrity.

The next paper explores submission to Christ – The 'Household' of the Self in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.



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