



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

---

Volume 14 Issue 3

January 18, 2014

## Church Leadership, Part 1

1 Corinthians 4:1-2, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. <sup>2</sup>Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

Periodically, it is necessary to ordain and install officers in the church. Now it is appropriate, prior to this important event, to examine a passage which speaks to the sobriety as well as the import of this occasion.

Who will you allow to minister to you?

Of all the great men and leaders of the Old Testament, King David most certainly would be named among them. He was a man “after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) who, with great faith, overwhelmed kings, conquered kingdoms, destroyed armies, and killed giants. And yet, behind him and beside him, we see great men- like these:

- Nathan.
- Uriah the Hittite.
- Jonathan.
- Benaiah
- Eleazar
- Shammah

What is most notable about these men is not so much what they did, but who they were on account of David’s high standard when it came to those whom he would allow to influence him.

Psalm 101:6b, “...He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me.”

This doesn’t mean that David required perfection on the part of these men. Rather, it means that these men were sensitive to the Lord and His word such that they were quick to deal with their sin upon its discovery.

Now, allow me to ask you this question: What is your requirement when it comes to those who will minister to you?

Realize this is a dangerous question if we do not derive our standard and our answer from Scripture. For David, it was blamelessness, Psalm 101:6b. For the Hebrew writer, it was godly fruit.

Hebrews 13:7, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”

For Peter, it was an exemplary life, 1 Peter 5:3.

1 Corinthians 4 gives a cross section of a church leader. Dr. John MacArthur describes it this way:

First Corinthians 4:1-5 focuses on the true nature and marks of God’s ministers. It sets forth the basic guidelines and standards by which ministers are to minister and be evaluated. It deals with what the congregation’s attitude toward the minister should be and what the minister’s attitude toward himself should be. In short, it puts the minister of God in God’s perspective. (MacArthur, 1984, pp. 95-96)

As we consider the anatomy of a church leader we must begin with his conflict.

1 Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man regard us in this manner..."

The key term here is λογίζομαι (*logizomai*) "regard." It was a word used in the commerce of Paul's day for reckoning or evaluating the worth or cost of something. Hence it is translated as "reckon," "charge," "deliberate," or "conclude." Accordingly, Paul is saying, if you are going to come to any conclusion about me, or for that manner any church leader, this is what must be the conclusion!

Before we look at what Paul would say ought to be the reputation of every church leader, I invite you to pause with me and consider a question: Why is Paul concerned here about what any man might think of him? What was behind this statement? There is a back-story of which we all should be aware as we endeavor to study this epistle or 2 Corinthians.

The church of Corinth was founded on Paul's Second Missionary Journey around AD 50. In fact, this city and church became the centerpiece of Paul's Second Journey in which he stayed 18 months (and possibly longer, cf. Acts 18:1-18a). It was from Corinth that Paul wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Furthermore during this time, he devoted himself almost exclusively to the ministry of the word, "testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:5).

Yet we know it was a difficult year and half in which Paul suffered great discouragement such that God in a vision commanded him not to fear but to keep on speaking (cf. Acts 18:9-10). Accordingly, Paul kept on ministering even in the face of mounting Jewish opposition which at one point took the form of bringing him before Gallic, the imperial proconsul, and charging him with political insurrection. Paul eventually was exonerated. When Paul felt his ministry was sufficiently discharged in Corinth, he left to return to Syria/Antioch, accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla and his Second Missionary Journey came to a close.

Paul then embarked upon his Third Missionary Journey which eventually would be centered in Ephesus. During this time, Paul endured great suffering and conflict at the hands of the local Gentile and Jewish population (cf. Acts 19). Yet it wasn't just in Ephesus! Evidently, after Paul left Corinth, a group of deceivers (2 Corinthians 11:13-14) arose from within the church calling themselves "Super Apostles."

2 Corinthians 11:3-5, "But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully. For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles [lit. 'super apostles']."

This was a serious threat which took multiple visits and epistles to overcome in order to protect this church from extinction! Essentially, these "Super Apostles" accused Paul of being common and plain; in essence, imbecilic. His teaching was not "spiritual" enough or "powerful" enough

or “moving”! Note well that this is the first example of a New Testament church struggling with mysticism, a problem that continues to plague the church today!

Paul’s reputation at this time, and this is key to our passage, took a huge hit! These “Super Apostles” viewed Paul as a weak, double-minded man whose message was not at all moving! How long would it be before the Church in Corinth adopted the theology and perspective of these deceivers? Accordingly, Paul wrote this epistle to expose their theology and their slanderous accusations. So when Paul writes, “Let a man regard us in this manner...” he is doing so in response to the multiple attacks that he had received upon his character, which makes our text amazing. Notice he doesn’t defend himself! Rather, he says, *“If you are going to believe anything about me, this is what I would have you believe!”* What was it? Was it that he was a super... powerful... intelligent... theologically savvy individual? No! Again, no defense! Rather, it was that he was a lowly servant!

From this I want you to see that a very real characteristic of leadership in the church is dealing with conflict! When a man takes on the responsibility of God’s people he will become a man well-acquainted with grief and oft-times under attack!

John 15:20 “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

This passage tells us that we ought to expect the same kind of treatment from the people of God that Christ received in His first advent. How did the people of God react to Him? They killed Him! And so the leaders of the early church likewise would be attacked. After being flogged and charged not to speak of Christ any longer, we read this of the disciples:

Acts 5:4, “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name.”

Again, we must understand that the persecution was NOT from a gentile world, BUT the very ones who claimed to love God! Recall Stephen’s words to the religious leaders of God’s people at the time:

Acts 7:52, “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?”

Listen to the consolation Paul gave Timothy who as a pastor at the time struggled with severe persecution from within the church:

2 Timothy 2:20, “Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.”

It is exactly what Christ warned about:

John 16:2b-3, "...an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. And these things they will do, because they have not known the Father, or Me."

Listen to Paul's further exhortation:

1 Corinthians 4:14-17, "I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet *you would not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church."

Dr. John MacArthur explains:

In his second letter to Corinth Paul describes in some detail what the life of a minister of God is like. He can expect affliction, hardship, distress, beatings, imprisonment, turmoil, sleeplessness, and hunger... (2 Corinthians 6:4-7). (MacArthur, 1984, p. 97)

In this context, I want to introduce you all to what has been called, "Well-Intentioned Dragons." (Shelley, 1994) Well-intentioned dragons are people in the body of Christ- who perceptively love the Lord- but for some reason have placed you in the cross-hairs. They mean well, but in the end their attack on you is deep, personal, and quite painful! David knew of them. On multiple occasions David testified to the following (cf. also Psalm 38:11, 41:9):

Psalm 55:12-14, "For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear *it*; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend. We who had sweet fellowship together, walked in the house of God in the throng."

Psalm 35:11-16, "Malicious witnesses rise up; they ask me of things that I do not know. They repay me evil for good, *to* the bereavement of my soul. [Behold the contrast and so the typical mode of ministry...] But as for ME, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer kept returning to my bosom. I went about as though it were my friend or brother; I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother. [This essentially is the pastoral ministry; it is the job of Church Leaders to pray for, love, and genuinely seek the best of God's people. And what at times will these people give in return?] But at my stumbling THEY rejoiced, and gathered themselves together; the smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me, they slandered me without ceasing. Like godless jesters at a feast, they gnashed at me with their teeth."

Leaders in Christ's church will suffer such betrayal; it comes with the territory. Leader's wives, get ready. Your husband will be attacked by the very people your family will sacrifice to serve.

Men, get ready. Many a roast will be served at a fellowship gathering and you will be the meat!

This is part and parcel of leadership! If it were not so, we wouldn't need the exhortation of Paul about only accepting an accusation against a church leader on the basis of two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). See, accusations will always fly when it comes to service in Christ's church:

- *You are uncaring.*
- *You are unloving.*
- *You do not care about the body.*
- *Your character is flawed.*

You say, "If that is the case, then why would any want to go into ministry as an elder or deacon?" It is an understandable question. Do you know how many church leaders this year will abandon the ministry on account of conflict from within the body of Christ? Tens of thousands! It is conflict...within the church... that primarily drives men from ministry!

So why stay? It is very simple; you love Christ and want to serve Him!

Well get this, Christ loves the church and His people- even the well-intentioned dragon. Accordingly, to abandon the church is to abandon that which Christ your Savior loves (2 Corinthians 5:14)! Accordingly, the calling that rests upon your life is NOT to defend or lash out when your good is evil spoken of, BUT to rely upon the Lord- to live in light of the Sufficiency of Christ! In the words of Peter, it is to, "...entrust your souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (1 Peter 4:19)!

So, part and parcel of ministry in Christ's church is conflict! Notice a second characteristic is a leader's concern for serving Christ.

1 Corinthians 4:1b, "Let a man regard us in this manner [there is no article with "man" which means that it was Paul's intention to make a universal statement here of how all church leaders are to be viewed], as servants of Christ..."

The word that Paul chose to use here of the church leader is NOT the word from which we get the office of Deacon from, *διάκονος* (*diakonos*), a general word for service in Christ's day. The word Paul chose to use, and it is used only here in the Pauline corpus,- is *ὑπηρέτης* (*hupēretēs*) which originally referenced an "under-rower." An under-rower was one who rowed in the lower part of a large ship. He was the most menial, unenvied, and despised of slaves. Accordingly, it is believed by many that housed in this word is the concept of a lowly, thankless service. It fits quite nicely with what we just saw above.

Yet that is NOT Paul's focus here. The focus of this exhortation revolves around the object of the church leader's service. Of whom is the church leader "a servant"? NOT the people of God! NOT even one another!<sup>1</sup> No! The church leader first and foremost is a servant of Christ! The

church ought NOT to view a church leader as their servant; and a church leader ought NOT to view themselves as a servant of the church.

This is an important distinction! To be the servant of someone or something speaks of one's obligation, tools, manner of carrying out one's service, and the like. If you were enslaved in the ancient world to a farmer, you became his servant. Your tools would be a shovel, plow, and many other farm tools! The way you advance was dependent upon the particular farm (was it a dog-eat-dog environment or a place of grace and mercy?)

I hope you see that the ONE whom we've been called to serve as leaders will impact and affect how we go about our service. So according to the Bible, whom has the church leader been called to serve? Christ Jesus!

Now when you consider the idea of being a servant of God in Scripture, the primary emphasis is that of the Lord's concern! Paul wrote this concerning the church leaders as servants of Christ:

Philippians 2:20-21, "For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus."

As a servant of the Lord, Paul was moved by what moved Christ! And talk about a hard go... at this time, very few were so concerned. Oh they may have been teaching in Christ's name and occupying themselves with Christ-activities, BUT in their hearts they were moved and driven by everything but Christ. The heart of a servant is the concern of the Master!

Luke 17:7-8, "But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will eat and drink'?"

This is the essence of a servant in the ancient world: his focus is the concern of the master, his welfare, his will, his work! And that is the emphasis with ὑπηρέτης (*hupēretēs*) here. Gordon Fee explained it this way:

...[ὑπηρέτης] refers to one who has the duties of administering the affairs of another. (Fee, 1987, p. 159)

That is the idea! And thus a mark of church leadership is being consumed with the plan, purpose, or CONCERN of Christ! When we consider this concern, the concern of Christ, at least two things come to mind (although we easily could suggest many more); first is God's glory. Christ is concerned with the Glory of God. In His High Priestly prayer, Jesus said:

John 17:4-5, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory

which I had with Thee before the world was.”

Family of God, there are so many verses in the Gospel accounts in which Christ is said to be moved by the glory of His Father! What did Christ tell His disciples when they were concerned about Christ’s dietary needs?

John 4:34, “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.’”

As the Master goes, so goes the servant! Accordingly what ought to be our greatest concern as church leaders/“Servants of Christ”? The glory of God- NOT, the size of the church, our fruit, or our apparent success! There is a place to talk about these things! But not as it relates to our ministry or our kingdom, BUT only as it concerns the Kingdom of God!

Secondly, we must be about Christ’s inheritance. Christ is greatly concerned for His people.

Deuteronomy 32:9, “For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance.”

God could have claimed anything for His inheritance... money, kingdoms, planets, solar systems. And yet that which God has claimed is a people! Solomon said at the dedication of the Temple speaking of the servant of God:

1 Kings 8:51, 53a, “...they are Thy people and Thine inheritance which Thou hast brought forth from Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace... For Thou hast separated them from all the peoples of the earth as Thine inheritance...”

Thus, David’s calling as a king revolved around caring for the people of God.

Psalm 78:70-71, “He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.”

This likewise has become the charge of church leaders everywhere.

1 Peter 5:2a, “...shepherd the flock of God among you...”

That was Paul’s point in the previous chapter. Using the imagery of farming or building, Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 3:9, “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

As church leaders we are dealing with God’s Possession!

What secondly ought to be our greatest concern as church leaders? The people whom God has



entrusted to our care- NOT the nonbeliever, the person who has not yet visited the church, or the empty chairs.

As sheep, we ought to be concerned for the lost. But as church leaders who will be held accountable NOT for the souls of lost individuals BUT those whom God has entrusted to our care (Hebrews 13:17). We must be moved in our office unto the growth, maturation, and well-being of those whom God has given us! This must always be the bottom line as we organize our committees, evaluate our ministries, and go forth as a church body.

We live in an age of commercialization where the church has ceased being viewed as the inheritance of God; it now first and foremost has become a business! And so we use

- The language of business.
- The tools of business.
- The culture of business.
- The concerns of a business.

...to govern, guide, and care for the body of Christ. Don't get me wrong! There is nothing wrong with using the jewels of Egypt as long as we wash them.

Yet in and through it all we must see that as church leaders we have been entrusted with "the inheritance of God" which is His people. Thus the bottom line is: will we do right by them in their walk, service, and maturation in the Lord? That secondly is what must drive us in this ministry!

Now as a church body, this also must be our prayer when it comes to the leadership of this body. We must long for and pray for men who will take seriously the stewardship given to them in you. May the net effect of our work here be your maturation individually and as a family!

## Bibliography

Fee, G. D. (1987). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (New International Commentary on the New Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

MacArthur, D. J. (1984). *First Corinthians MacArthur New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series)*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

Shelley, M. (1994). *Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church*. Grand Rapids: Bethany Hous Publishers.

## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Although scripturally we are called to wash each other's feet, John 13:14.