

Church Leadership

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Nobody Listens to a Word I Have to Say

I was leading a Bible study group the other week, and it became obvious to me afterwards that, although they said to my face that they thought my talk was good, they had actually not listened to a word I had to say. And this was not the only occasion that I have experienced this phenomenon.

Firstly, I have to ask: Why should they listen to me? Who am I that people should drop everything and change their views to follow my ways of thinking instead? I am nothing. I always will be nothing in this world. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean to say that I am therefore not worth listening to. Whenever I speak the truth from the Bible, the Holy Spirit can use it to change people and help me be useful to others. It is the Word of God that is living and powerful, not me:

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The lesson here is to realise that only the Holy Spirit can do this. I am totally incapable. And that is what everyone who is in a leadership position ought to realise about themselves. We are nothing. But if we do speak, we must make sure that we stay close to the Bible:

1 Peter 4:11

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.

And this has also led me to ask the question: How does leadership actually work? Let's take a random example. Let's suppose that the church leader firmly believes that the church should keep traditional worship, because he is convinced that is Biblical. But a sizeable number of the congregation want to introduce a modern "worship band" into the service.

First of all, the leader can preach from the pulpit why he believes the way he does. That's the first thing he should do. But it is not up to him with his persuasive arguments to win the day. After he has preached on the subject, he then has to leave it to the Holy Spirit to convince his congregation, one at a time. He would pray of course, but he can do no

more than preach and leave it to the Lord to change hearts. If the congregation still disagree with him after he has preached, he can continue to preach about it, but if he does that too often, he runs the risk of getting the sack. Or, put it this way, eventually either his congregation will leave or he will.

Many churches try to force people to fit in to a certain way, truly believing their way is the Biblical pattern. For example, churches that insist the ladies cover their heads in the worship service. They genuinely believe this is a Biblical practice, but nobody can force ladies to do this. All we can do is preach from the Scripture (1 Corinthians 11:1-16) and leave it to the Lord to convince each of them individually. If we try to force all the ladies in our congregation to cover their heads, which some churches do, not only would most ladies probably end up going elsewhere to worship, but there would also be some who stay but who would be doing it against their own consciences. The Bible clearly states that such an attitude is wrong:

Romans 14:28

Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Many ladies, who are true believers, would never come agree with a church on this matter until the day they die. Many young people are true believers, but they still love the excitement of modern music and won't be convinced not to have a "worship band." In fact, all of us, even though we're true believers, will die before the Holy Spirit leads us to the truth on many things. Should we be either forced out of a church because of our ignorance, or told to outwardly perform a practice that the Holy Spirit at the present time in our spiritual growth has not convinced us of yet?

I really don't understand how church leadership works at all. The Holy Spirit convicts and convinces individuals. Only then, when people understand Biblical principles in their hearts, will they change for the better. Surely, no leader ought to force people against their will to do anything. Only the Holy Spirit can change hearts, and at the same time He make us willing to change:

Psalms 110:3

Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.

Oh yes, there are plenty of forceful leadership types in high positions in the church who use their assertive behaviour to gather a following behind them. They have the power to get people to believe their every whim. The so-called "Christian" television channels are full of these arrogant individuals. But that dominating, aggressive attitude can't possibly be right. True religion is far, far from this sort of attitude.

So, what is the answer? Every visible church in existence has a certain way of doing things, which may or may not be Biblical. Yes, we have instructions in the Bible as to how we should set up visible churches on this earth, so we do have a pattern to follow. But even with the right outward pattern – which we should indeed be striving for – we can only live in the light of what we have personally received from the Lord at any one time. Our conscience should never be violated by anything anyone says. But, if, through another person's words, the Holy Spirit is speaking to us, our consciences will be changed to receive the truth that we could not see before.

This is the true Christian life. It is not about following eloquent preachers and forceful men. It is not about joining a certain church or other. It is not about outward, this-worldly

persuasive powers telling us what to think at all. It is about the Holy Spirit convincing us in our hearts. That is Christian growth. And all of us, not just the church leaders, should be encouraging each other in the faith. Not that people should listen to us, but in order that the Holy Spirit may work in people's hearts through our words.

Leadership: A Lust, not a Gift

1. Introduction

If you have had even a small glimpse at the Christian press, you will see that Christian leadership conferences abound. Christian leadership seminars, forums, and all kinds of meetings are arranged especially for Christian "leaders," or rather everyone who sees themselves as such.

It is also thought of amongst most Christians, that going into "the ministry" or at least into "full time Christian work" should be the goal of every Christian, and certainly a higher sphere of activity than the ordinary mortal in the church pews. I heard a sermon recently in which was mentioned a man who was a drunkard, a swearer and a blasphemer, who came to a knowledge of Christ and gave up all these things. Excellent! Let us hear more of such testimonies! But then the preacher relating this story went on to say that the man has now become a pastor to a large congregation – as though that was the ultimate position to be in – a higher, more noble calling than the riff-raff who just sit in the pews week by week and only have "secular" jobs. Why couldn't the story have been about a man who was converted and then went on to be a great Christian toilet cleaner, cleaning toilets for Jesus? Because that doesn't fit into our mindset of what a great Christian is all about. We are brainwashed into thinking that the Christian minister or pastor has the highest calling of all, and then there are the rest of us. This is totally wrong. Incidentally, I have never known of any conferences for Christian toilet cleaners. I suggest that they are too busy getting on with their work, than to spend all their time talking about how to be more effective in their calling, and consequently spending as little time as possible actually doing their job.

"Leadership," far from being something great in the church, is a mark of worldliness, not a mark of grace. Nearly all church splits have been caused by leadership battles between men, and doctrine and righteousness are only used as excuses to split the church.

Leaders should be aware that there is an army of real, truly born-again Christians out there who are fed up with their church leaders, are "*without the camp*" (Hebrews 13:13), and are foraging for their spiritual food daily wherever they can find it, because the self-styled leaders in the churches have let them all down. Leaders in the church should not play their silly games, thinking themselves to be something, when they are nothing (Galatians 6:3). This is a serious business, and should be treated as such.

2. The Spiritual Gifts

Notice I have described leadership as a “lust.” Most people think of it as a gift (and they would say “from God”), but it is nowhere mentioned in the list of spiritual gifts in the Bible. The main New Testament passages where spiritual gifts are mentioned are as follows:

Romans 12:6-8

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Gifts here include: *prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, showing mercy.*

1 Corinthians 12:8-10

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.

Gifts here include: *word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues.*

1 Corinthians 12:28

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Gifts here include: *apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.*

Ephesians 4:11

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers....

Gifts here include: *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.*

These gifts are spiritual, and together with the offices of bishop (overseer) and deacon mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, they are given by God, as He pleases, to His people. Note leadership is not amongst them.

Let us look at these gifts in turn.

Firstly, let us take out “*giving, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, miracles, healings, diversities of tongues.*” These are irrelevant to our subject.

Apostles

This is an extraordinary office for the time before the New Testament canon was complete. Nobody is an apostle now. An apostle is defined as one who had:

Acts 1:21,22

....accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

Paul was later counted an apostle, but he was unique:

1 Corinthians 15:8

....as of one born out of due time.

And that is it. No apostles for today, despite some men claiming to be such. The apostles had real authority in the church, and still do so today through the Scriptures. So when we see the apostles making authoritative decrees in Scripture, yes, they have authority, and we should follow them. But no man has this power today. So no man should emulate the apostles in trying to get followers to follow their every whim, pretending it is a message directly from the Lord.

In fact, look at how Paul's character changed. Before his conversion he was a frightening character, who:

Acts 8:3

....made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

After he had been converted, he was given the authority of an apostle (unlike men today), but the Corinthians complained that "*his bodily presence*" was "*weak, and his speech contemptible*":

2 Corinthians 10:8-10

For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed: that I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

His letters were weighty and powerful because of the true apostolic authority given by God that was behind them, but this great leader, this:

Philippians 3:5,6

....Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless....

had now become in himself, thanks to the grace of God, a man whose "*bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.*"

Conversion changes the soul, and cleanses us from our old, self-assertive, aggressive nature. We should never use Paul or any of the apostles as examples as to how we should behave with regards their authority, because their authority was real, and we do not have this today – we have the Scriptures instead. But we can use Paul as an example of how the new nature should change our hearts.

Prophets

If, by “*prophets*,” we mean people who can miraculously foretell the future, as indeed some of the Old Testament prophets could, then no-one should ever claim to have this gift in our days. We don’t need it. We have the Scriptures, and they are sufficient for all our needs. Anyone who claims to be a prophet in that sense today, is too highly regarding himself. Even Amos, who really did have a true gift of prophecy from God, did not claim to be anyone special. He was just an ordinary workman; not even a church leader:

Amos 7:14,15

Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.

Having said that, if, by “*prophet*,” we simply mean someone who had the gift that the children of Issachar had, who:

1 Chronicles 12:32

.... had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do,

In this case, yes, some people do have more sense and insight into applying Biblical truths for our situation today, so in this sense it is a valid gift for today. But note, these were the children of Issachar, not the priests, Levites or church leaders.

Minister

This is not a man in charge, with “leadership skills,” who speaks “*ex cathedra*” from the pulpit and whom you are not allowed to question. In most verses in the New Testament it is the Greek word “*diakonos*,” which means “*servant*,” and is exactly the same word from which we get the word “*deacon*.” It is generally distinguished in the Authorised Version from the word “*servant*” which is the Greek word “*doulos*,” really meaning “*slave*.” So “*diakonos*” implies a voluntary servitude. This is a far cry from those men who fancy themselves in the pulpit and love to have a following.

There are other words translated “*minister*” in the New Testament:

“*uphreths*,” which means “*subordinate*.” i.e. not a leadership position at all, but the position of an assistant;

“*leitourgos*,” which means “*public servant*,” again, not implying leadership of any kind.

Evangelist

This, too, is seen by some as an extraordinary office, no longer in use today. If so, then it means some special gift for the propagation of the gospel in New Testament times, before churches were properly established. Once churches had been established it was not needed any more, so it was only a temporary office. But that view tends to exalt the role

of the visible church today too highly, as the bishops and deacons of it are exalted to become the only ordinary means of hearing and propagating the gospel.

A second view is just as bad. Today, people think of an “*evangelist*” as someone with a special gift of public speaking and persuasion, who holds special “evangelistic” meetings and gets all the glory when so many people come to “accept Jesus” into their lives. These are called “converts,” although how many of them are truly converted by the Spirit of God is another matter. This idea exalts the man far too highly.

A third, more balanced, view is to see this simply as a gift for missionary work. People who have the gift of going into a region of the world where the gospel is hardly known and trying to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to people who have never heard of it before. But even this has been corrupted in our day. “Missionaries” in the past went to the mission field for life, making great sacrifice and often coming to an early death – all for the sake of the gospel. Today they are people who live quite comfortably, far above the level of those around them whom they are trying to evangelise. As long as they send a missionary newsletter back to their home church every so often, with lots of positive messages in it, and go back with a slide show once a year, with an upbeat message of how wonderfully the work is progressing, people will carry on giving them money to continue their comfortable lifestyle. And most of them don’t preach Christ at all, but all they do is (inadvertently maybe) bring Western culture (guitars and foot-tapping tunes) to a region of the world that doesn’t need or want it.

Teacher

This is not a position of leadership either. Teachers are those that can understand the truths of the Bible and have the ability to communicate them to others. This is not usually in the way of a man in the pulpit telling people what to believe. Although sometimes a lecture is a useful thing, the best teachers are those who can sit alongside the pupil on a one to one basis, all the time asking if they have understood things, and if not, to help them until they do. The best teachers really want the pupil to understand *for himself*, and this is the gift that some have, and it is good, and certainly not a leadership role.

Exhortation

What is the difference between “*teaching*” and “*exhorting*”? “*Exhortation*” is just a word of practical advice, *i.e.* practical application of the teaching. This is a separate gift to that of teaching, although closely linked.

Preacher

This is not actually mentioned as a gift in the above verses, but something needs to be said about it, because today people have such a wrong view of what a preacher is. It is not a separate office of any kind. The word “*preacher*” in the New Testament is the Greek word “*khrucho*,” meaning “*herald*.” Someone with a message to give. That is all. This is not a leadership position. Today we think of “*preachers*” as leaders of churches who give an authoritative message when they are in the pulpit. Oh no they don’t. Every message from

every pulpit is a mixture of truth and error. We are to discern the truth, not to blindly follow and accept everything spoken.

There is in existence a very high view of “preaching” which believes that: “*The only divinely authorised public means for the instruction and conversion of sinners is the verbal proclamation of God’s holy Word*” (Affirmation 2010 document). I have a really, really big problem with this. It is as though preaching is some kind of magic.

The proof texts given (Luke 24:46-48; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 4:5) show the importance of preaching but not the exclusivity of it in the conversion of sinners. I was converted by picking up a Bible and reading it, the Holy Ghost opening my heart to receive its truth. Other people I know also had the same experience. Others I know were converted through talking with Christian friends. Very few people I know actually were converted through preaching. In the Reformation, there was a call, “The primacy of preaching.” But this was in opposition to the primacy of the Roman Catholic ritual. Today, this is different, and we shouldn’t use that phrase any more. We should instead change it to “The primacy of the Word of God.” The preaching may *contain* the Word of God (and where it does it can be used by God to be effectual), but the Bible actually IS the Word of God. Where the truths of the Word of God coincide with what is preached then God may use it, but the primacy must surely be given to the Word of God, not preaching itself.

Nowadays too many preachers exalt themselves far too highly and love to have a following, thinking that an ordained minister preaching is the ultimate tool used by God to save sinners. They claim they have the only ordinary means of conversion in their hands. This is no different from the Roman Catholic priest thinking that only he has the power to convert the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Both would agree the Holy Ghost actually converts souls, but they would believe that it was only ever (ordinarily) through the means of their actions or words.

To summarise: I fully appreciate that some men are set apart for the Word of God as “*teachers*,” who ordinarily leave their secular employment to teach the Word of God full time:

1 Timothy 5:18

For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

But they are one of us. They too, just like the rest of us, are growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour (2 Peter 3:18). They have no special function, no special powers. To think that they do, is to head firmly in the direction of Roman Catholicism, and is not Biblical Christianity.

Pastor

This word is only found here in Ephesians 4:11 and in Jeremiah. The Greek word here is “*poimin*,” and means “*shepherd*.” The Hebrew word in Jeremiah is “*reh*,” meaning “*to tend a flock*,” which we might consider as a leadership position, but the Hebrew definition also has the connotation “*to associate with as a friend or companion*.” Yes, there is a gift of befriending, some people are genuinely good at it, and they should use it properly, guiding gently, not guiding as a leader in a pulpit, forever at a distance from the recipient.

Deacon

As mentioned earlier, this is the Greek word “*diakonos*,” which means “*servant*,” and is the main word translated in the New Testament as “*minister*.” There is also such thing as “*the office of a deacon*” (1 Timothy 3:10,13), which is a special position in the visible church, looking after the practical aspects of a particular congregation. This is in no way a leadership role, but a Biblical office, for a specific purpose. A good candidate for this office is one who has the gifts of “*showing mercy*” (Romans 12:8) and “*helps*” (1 Corinthians 12:28) in order that things are done decently and in order in the church.

Bishop (Overseer)

Surely, finally we've come to a leadership position, along with the gifts of “*ruling*” (Romans 12:8) and “*governments*” (1 Corinthians 12:28)? Well, someone has got to do the work of making decisions in visible churches. God has ordained the office of bishop, or overseer, in order to do this. However, the last people who should be bishops are those who fancy themselves as such, and those with a lust for leadership that they cannot control.

The bishops should be taken from the elders, the older men, *i.e.* the more experienced Christians amongst the congregation:

Titus 1:5

....ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee....

1 Timothy 3:6

....not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

The most experienced Christians, the elders, form the presbytery, where all the decisions are made about the visible church. Eldership is not an office. People grow, or mature, into it. It's not a position to be elected to. Bishops, or overseers, are taken from among this number. Yet often we see people not much more than a year in the faith becoming a bishop, because they have worldly “*management*” skills. That is the wrong criteria to use. And in most churches, bishops are elected by voting in the congregations. That is the last thing that should happen, as most ordinary members of the congregation can't discern true spirituality from false management techniques used in order to deceive.

If the bishops were limited only to those who were thirty years professing the true faith or more (assuming they fit all the other criteria mentioned in the Bible, *cf.* 1 Timothy 3), then these people only should be the ones who have been humbled enough, sanctified enough, to be able to oversee properly (although that could still not be the case because we can't see the heart).

In fact the leadership positions in the church (no matter which denomination we are talking about) are always going to be filled with those who fancy themselves as leaders. Men are by nature self-assertive, and if they want a top position, and they are aggressive enough and have sufficient worldly management skills, they will get what they want. Those who, on the other hand, are nurturing their new nature in Christ, would not be self-assertive any more, they would begin to learn the Christian virtue of self-abasement, and

they will not tend to get leadership positions as the worldly ones will walk all over them in their lust to get to the top.

Yes, some good men will be in high places, *cf.* Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus, and they should use their position as best they can, but they will always be marginalised by the majority in the leadership.

The fact is that no matter how good or pure a church tries to be, worldly men will fight for the positions of leadership. Their worldly nature does not teach them any other way. The brambles will always end up in control, because the true believers will have something far better to do than to play management games:

Judges 9:8-15

The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

Notice that in 1 Corinthians 12:28, where some spiritual gifts are ranked in order of importance, the gift of “governments” is ranked on the lowest level. So, we should all know our place!

3. What Leadership Is

Leadership is a thoroughly worldly phenomenon, found in all walks of life, not just in the church. Some people are “born leaders,” and this is seen in the world as being something good. But it is nothing else but wickedness and evil.

“Born leaders” are those who have a dominating personality and an uncontrollable desire for control. You know the sort of person – someone who, when he walks into the room, has to be the centre of attention. The conversation that had been going on suddenly stops on their entrance, and they lead the conversation until such time as they leave the room again. It is an uncanny real power that they have, and many people are completely taken in by it, and blindly follow, because they’re afraid not to. Where is any Christian virtue in this?

Such people have a great sense of their own importance, they are totally self-centred, self-assertive and self-confident. The world revolves around them. This is totally opposite from the self-abasement that the Christian ought to have. We should see ourselves as nothing, not as some great somebody who the world must listen to.

They know they have the power to attract a following, and will certainly use this phenomenon to their own advantage. They also have to have control over every situation. They can’t bear it when they are not in control any more, and many commit suicide when

this happens, cf. Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23). They have a lust for a following and make sure that they get one.

This sort of personality usually ends up as a businessman or a sales representative. They are all around us. We come across many of them in our lives. And they are dangerous, easily persuading people to do or buy what they don't really want.

Further, this worldly phenomenon is everywhere in the church as well. It is not a gift of leadership, but a lust, a craving from the evil one for control. Yet so many people in the churches think of it as a spiritual gift and that it is actually a good thing to have dominating personalities in the church. People only think this so that they can justify their blindly following such men anywhere they lead.

The apostle Paul was a "born leader." He had just this kind of personality before conversion, so he knew what it was to have the power to persuade people to blindly follow him, and could exercise this power whenever he wanted. But after his conversion, look what he says:

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

He, amazingly, did NOT use the power of persuasion, which he naturally had, in order to win converts to Christ. This was a deliberate decision on his part. His preaching was "NOT with enticing words of man's wisdom," because that would have ended up with people following him, not Christ. He "determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." He subdued his carnal nature, and ability to persuade men with worldly wisdom, and determined only to present the truth in a straightforward, genuine manner, so that their "faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," i.e. so that their faith would be genuine. This is against all our natural instincts. Paul deliberately did NOT use the carnal ability of persuasion, which he knew he had, as he could so easily have done. How many preachers are like this today?

So, how do we propagate the Christian faith? Whatever we do, we should not use a worldly, persuasive power in order to promote the truth. This being against all our natural instincts, we must trust in the Holy Spirit alone to give us the words to say, without being tempted by the devil into using human forms of persuasion.

The disciples had a lust to be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. This is recorded twice in Luke's gospel alone, so they must have thought about it more than once:

Luke 9:46

Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, and said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

Luke 22:24-26

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

Note, Christ did not say to the disciples, “God has given you the gift of leadership – a dominating personality that you should use for the building up of my kingdom.” No. He told them to get rid of all such thoughts from their minds. Leadership is not a “gift” from God to be used for the kingdom’s sake. We are to put such worldly traits away from us. We all have lusts and desires in our carnal natures that, upon becoming a Christian, we need to subdue and mortify. The new nature, the new heart, the Holy Spirit is now within us, to help us to do this. A lust for leadership is one of these things we must mortify if we are to be sanctified thoroughly by the Holy Spirit.

The Christian life is one of constantly being humbled for our sins. God has shut us all up to decay and death in order that we subdue our lusts for power completely and utterly.

Nebuchadnezzar, otherwise a great despotic leader, was humbled by God and saw this:

Daniel 4:37
Those that walk in pride He is able to abase.

The psalmist saw this:

Psalms 138:6
Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.

The whole Christian message is for us to abase self and exalt God in our lives – to be like little children, servants.

Matthew 5:3
Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The poor in spirit are the only ones who will inherit the kingdom of heaven, not those who know they have a power of persuasion and use it.

So, should we have Christian businessmen and sales representatives? Well, these callings are not unlawful as such, but try selling products without the wicked, humanistic, worldly powers of persuasion that our rivals will use. It will be difficult, and we might eventually have to change our job, and become, God forbid, a toilet cleaner. But our conscience would be clear.

Similarly, a call to all those in leadership in the church. Seriously reconsider what you think is a “calling from God.” The calling to work in a church as such is not unlawful, but be careful you are not using worldly means to get what you want, namely a name in the church for yourself.

Jeremiah said to Baruch:

Jeremiah 45:5

And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD.

This is a call to us all.

4. Conclusion

If anyone thinks he has the “gift” of leadership – get rid of it. It is a mark of the self-assertive world, not a mark of grace. Self-abasement is the Christian way. I know of a minister of a church who was suspended from the ministry after he was found to have committed adultery. After a few months he was banging on the door of his presbytery asking to be reinstated as minister because he said he had now repented. They did not let him back in, so he left and went to another denomination. He stayed there a few months, and he was not allowed into the pulpit there either, so, the last I heard, he had finally resumed preaching again in yet another denomination. Why didn't he just give up wanting to be in charge all the time? Why couldn't he just resign himself to sitting in the pews with everybody else? Because of a lust for leadership which drove him on.

The ultimate question we have to think upon is this: Let us suppose these leaders all get into heaven (let us be charitable for a moment). What would they do there? No Synods to attend, no committees to be on, no followers to control. They would just be bowing down and worshipping God for eternity, as servants to a holy master. They would hate it. Let that be a warning to us all to shun the lust for leadership and become as little children. That is the calling of every Christian in this world.

Who Controls Your Church?

Who is the head of the church? Jesus Christ of course!

Ephesians 5:23

Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

1 Corinthians 3:11

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:18

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

And everyone who is a member of that invisible body, the true church, shall be saved by Christ, not one will be lost.

John 6:39

And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

That's the comfort for the Christian. But what about each visible organisation that calls itself the church – every group of people in every place who profess Christianity as the true religion (whether they're truly born-again or not)? In theory, Jesus Christ should be the head of all of these visible churches too.

But invariably visible churches are instead led by controlling people. From the largest church controlled by the pope of Rome, to the smallest tinpot little church down your street, most of them have someone in charge who wants to control the whole show.

Now, someone is needed to lead the church. "Governments" is a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:28). We can't have anarchy, someone's got to be there to lead and organise. But Peter teaches leaders how they ought to behave:

1 Peter 5:2,3

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

Today we have too few leaders who perform their duty willingly, of a ready mind and as an ensample to the flock, and too many leaders who perform their duty by constraint, for filthy lucre and as lords over God's heritage.

Notice that here the church is called "God's heritage." That should make us tremble. We should all be taking our duties in the churches so very seriously. But too many people today want control, and take no care at all for the real needs of the flock.

There is nothing new in this. We find this situation throughout Scripture:

Jeremiah 10:21

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 23:2

Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD.

Ezekiel 34:5,6

And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

Matthew 9:36

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

I know so many true Christian people, who have been hurt by one or more churches because they have been dealt with very poorly by the church leaders. And many of them end up not going anywhere to church, or if they do, they either stay on the periphery of a church or wander around the churches never settling in one. Controlling leaders really

don't know how to deal with other people, although they flatter themselves to think they do.

There are many different types of controlling leader:

Some talk so much that they just expect people to shut up and listen to them. Maybe they've found out that most of the time that works. I must admit, whenever I come across someone who just won't stop talking, I know that even if I did get a chance to say something, they wouldn't listen anyway, so what's the point saying anything?

And if anybody comes along that genuinely needed spiritual help, they would never go to that sort of person for help, but just bottle everything up and eventually leave the church. And these controlling people are totally oblivious to any problem, always thinking that whatever fault there may be, resides in the person who's left, and never themselves.

Then there are other controlling people who hide behind the organisation. An organisation always ends up larger than the sum of the individuals in it. If you ever find yourself in an organisation that claims to be the one true church, GET OUT! I don't care how big it is or how "sound" in doctrine it claims to be. The fact is that one or two men are at the top controlling everything, and you're not allowed to disagree with anything they say. Examples are the Roman Catholic church, Eastern Orthodox churches, Jehovah's Witnesses and Exclusive Brethren.

Raymond Franz was a man who spent 40 years of his life being a zealous Jehovah's Witness, the last 15 years in the Watchtower headquarters in New York. He grew in the ranks until one day, to his delight, he was invited to become one of the "twelve apostles," the controlling rulers of the whole organisation. Once "inside," he found out that the organisation he had been working for for all those years, made all their decisions by a simple majority vote of the ruling board, with no recourse to prayer or the Bible. So he left, and was disfellowshipped.

Who is making the decisions in your church, and how? If you don't know, then it's time to find out. And if they don't like you snooping, then it may be time to leave.

Then there are others who know they have a silver tongue and the power of persuasion. They know they can attract a following for themselves, they know that they can get huge numbers of people to throw money at them and follow their every decree, so they go about this as a very successful business model, and as a result live very comfortable lives. The people who follow this sort of controlling person, are simple people, "yes-men" who can never think for themselves. And there are plenty of them. Real people with real problems who want real Christians to help them, can again see straight through all this, and realise there's no help for them there either.

And then there are others who aren't so talkative, they aren't at the top of a large organisation, neither are they persuasive personalities who can attract a following, but they are still just as controlling. They lead their little church, but everything down to the very last detail has to be the way they want it. They are totally closed to other people's suggestions. They invariably end up emptying the church, rather than attracting a following. But they still carry on, thinking they're doing God's work, and believing that God will bring people into the church in His own good time. They never even think for a moment that the problem of an empty church might at least be partly to do with

themselves. Again, real people with real problems who want real Christians to help them, would walk away.

It's because of all of this control being exercised in the churches, by many different kinds of people in many different ways, that so many true Christians are desperately lonely, without any real fellowship at all.

Now let's talk about William Carey. William Carey (1761-1834) was a Baptist pastor and is best known in church history as the father of the modern missionary movement. He went to Bengal in 1793 and stayed there for the rest of his life. Carey's wife Dorothy had never travelled more than a few miles from her home in her life before, and never really wanted to go with him.

After arriving in India, and especially after their son died of dysentery, Dorothy went mad. She died in 1807. Within less than a year William Carey had remarried.

What do you think of that? Was William Carey right to go to India at all? Just to ask that question sends shock waves down most Christians' spines. "Of course he was right!" would be the usual reply, "God told him to go!" But really, I'm asking the question genuinely and seriously, was he right?

He deliberately carried on with the work he thought God had got him to do, while his wife went mad. Whatever happened to the injunction:

Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

It's also recorded that his children weren't very well disciplined either. The Bible teaches that one of the criteria for being an overseer in the church is that he should be:

1 Timothy 3:4,5

One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

William Carey, rather than showing all the traits of a godly man, showed all the traits of being a very controlling person. Everything had to be done his way. "Oh! But he's a hero of the faith!" you may say. Yes. That's what all the Christian books tell us. But before he even thought about going as a missionary to India, the Lord had, in His providence, given him a wife.

Proverbs 18:22

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

And he had been blessed with a family.

Psalms 127:3

Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

Now, if he hadn't been given these things, or at least had been given a wife that shared his desire to go to India, then that would have been a positive indication for him to go. But that wasn't the case. When trying to understand the Lord's will for his life, he should have taken his family into consideration. But instead, as far as he was concerned, his wife's

thoughts, wishes, and desires, all had to eventually be subsumed to his. That's the mark of a controlling person.

The Lord in His providence had given William Carey a family to look after and to keep. To cast their thoughts aside for his desire to be a missionary is no different from Buddha dumping his wife and family to seek "enlightenment." It's not right.

William Carey had also been given the spiritual gift of tongues – he was very good at languages. That was the gift the Lord had given him, not the gift of being a missionary. After he got to India, he never really made many converts. He ended up spending most of his time there translating the Bible. That was a good thing to do. That was his gift. But he could have done that in England.

We should make sure that we work with the situation the Lord has given us, not try to leave it, or worse still, drag the people we are involved with where they really, really, truly don't want to go.

But what about missionary work, and the spreading of the gospel? Esther had it right:

Esther 4:14

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Esther, in the Lord's providence, was in just the right place at just the right time, and she realised that she was exactly the one the Lord had put there to seek the king's help when it was needed. In William Carey's situation however, the Lord, in his providence, had given him a family to be responsible for. Rather than Carey thinking to himself that God wanted him to go to India, he should have seen the situation the Lord had given to him, and realised that if the Lord wanted someone to convert the heathen in India, He would provide the right people, people who would be suitable equipped for the task. From home in England, as well as doing the work of Bible translation, he could have continued to pray for missionary work. He would have lived a perfectly useful, fulfilling life. But he should never have gone himself.

Is this you?? Are you a controller? Ask your wife. Or maybe the wife is the controller? All of us are responsible before God for the actions we take in this life. And that includes controllers. Let's make sure that we really, truly understand exactly what the Lord want us to do, based on the situation He has put us in and the people we've been given in His providence to deal with. Let's stop pretending the Lord has got a great work for us to do. He's got a small work, in keeping with our situation. Let's get on with it.

James 3:1

My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

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