

05/04/2020 6pm Church Leadership by Val Whiteman

(1 Timothy 3:1-13, 5:17-21)

How many of us have been in any leadership roles? Probably most of us either in the church or in work. No doubt we'll have been trained as well. There may be some among us who have studied for an MBA and are therefore well aware of different management styles and their effectiveness. When I look at some of them, the Autocratic, the Laissez Faire, and so on, few of them look at what Paul thought was important in a leader of the church.

In this talk, I want to look at several aspects of leadership. How should leaders behave first of all. Which model should they use: then who should be a leader, and what characterises their behaviour, and finally how should we as those led behave towards our leaders.

First of all, Background. The early church didn't have a model about being church. It had the model of Jesus discipling people, and He chose 12 to teach more deeply, and encouraged them to teach others, and do what He did. It's important to stress this at the beginning. Jesus told us how Christian leaders should behave when He washed the disciples' feet and told them that in the Kingdom of God, being a leader means you should be servant of all.

Luke 22:25-27:

²⁵ The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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.

In John 13 John describes Jesus washing the disciples' feet:

¹² Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

The model of leadership there is far removed from most secular models (though you might like to Google “Servant Leadership”) It’s sadly also far removed from most church hierarchical models.

So the “How” of Christian leadership is clear. Do as Jesus did. Be a servant to the church. He loved the world enough to die for it, and the same is expected of us and of our leaders.

Here in the Timothy reading we are looking at today, Paul fleshes this out with the “who”. Who should be a leader? What are their characteristics?

2 Timothy 3: 1-13

¹ But mark this: there will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

⁶ They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, ⁷ always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. ⁹ But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

¹⁰ You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

You note that Paul says that it’s good to aspire to be an overseer. It shouldn’t be a chore but a calling, a gift from God. The list in Romans 12:6-8, gives Leadership as one of the spiritual gifts; “ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

You see from the list it’s one gift among many.

The word “overseer” in the passage is sometimes translated as bishop, or elder, or presbyter, so for us I suppose it would be church leader. Quite often in the epistles we can see that there’s more than one elder, no one having all the burden of leading, which again seems to have been a biblical expectation. Remember we’re thinking about 1st century Ephesus here. The church didn’t have a set of fixed rules about how churches were to be governed, no hierarchies, no theological colleges. The church models seems to have varied from church to church and it’s difficult to work out many of them. Most of them seem to have been based on the synagogue model where there were also groups of elders. Remember in Acts chapter 6, where the disciples were thinking through how to do church after Jesus’ ascension. They were expecting His return very soon, but they still had to face the problems of how to teach many new converts, how to integrate Jews and Gentiles, how to do pastoral care, in fact how to model Jesus in this new age and new kingdom. In Acts the apostles split tasks, appointing deacons to do the pastoral stuff, the alms distribution, while the apostles do the teaching.

Acts 6:2-4

² It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

The definition in Acts, though, shows that the “deacon” – a word which means servant, minister, messenger in Greek- had to be full of the Spirit This is clearly not as hierarchical as it appears. God doesn’t seem to think so. The first martyr is a Deacon, Stephen who was a preacher as well as a pastoral minister.

There is a difference of gifting, not a difference in importance. (and that’s important).

So, if you aspire to be an overseer, what do you need? If we look at the list it is surprising. It’s mostly about how the overseer is seen, his behaviour. Does what he professes to believe make a difference to how he lives? He has to be mature in his belief. It’s too much responsibility to give to a recent convert who has not learned to live as a servant of Christ. The list is a really big ask. The

overseer must be respected in the church and outside it. Paul also focuses on family life. Are we back to the Christian seeming obsession with sexual morality? Yes and no. In demanding that anyone who wants to be an overseer has a stable family life, he is saying that the overseer must show the love and respect for his wife and children that you'd expect from a follower of Christ. Christian marriage is for both partners to grow in love and faith together. If you can't keep the promises you made to your spouse, then how can we expect you to be faithful in the church?

The list of good behaviours is comprehensive. You shouldn't love money, you shouldn't drink, you shouldn't quarrel "temperate, self controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach."

The same is true of deacons and deaconesses. (and there were deaconesses before they got written out- see Phoebe who takes the Paul's letter to the Roman church to Rome. Not just a messenger but an interpreter too). It says in v 10 "they must be tested". Just as now, if you think you have a vocation, a call from God, you have to test it to make sure it really is from God. Nowadays this happens by thought and prayer, by taking training which helps with discernment, by talking to others, before you get to the official bit of interviews, day long assessment, further training for years and on going appraisals. All this is an excellent thing. Paul makes it clear that choosing good leaders is necessary for the health of the church.

What's in it for the leaders? Verse 13 helps: ¹³Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Being in a leadership role like this as you can see, grows their own faith, as they see God working through them and the church.

What does it mean for the rest of the church? For that we turn to the next reading.

1Timothy 5:17-21

¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.' ¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. ²⁰ But those elders

who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning. ²¹ I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism.

There are 2 common aspects to our response to our leaders which Paul focuses on.

I love the fact that Paul recognises what happens in the real world. We grumble. No leader is perfect, so we find what we see as weaknesses and grumble like mad: on the other hand, sometimes we find that leaders give into temptation and we need to do something about it. So Paul gives us instructions too. First we should honour our leaders. Often they have given up secular careers to serve God full time.

1 Thess. 5:12-13:

¹² Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

Heb. 13:7-8

⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever

Heb. 13:17

¹⁷ Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

Though Paul himself was careful as an evangelist not to be a burden on the churches he founded, and worked as a tentmaker, he recognises here that not everyone can do this. If you are working for the church, you deserve respect and help “the worker deserves his wages”. Wages in every way- financially but also in the way the leader is treated. You don’t as a congregation begrudge the support given to a leader. Also you don’t accuse them lightly.

Here he moves to the second part of churches dealing with leaders. What happens when it all goes wrong?

Paul establishes principles which come from Scripture. He says if you think leaders are doing wrong you have to bring 2 or 3 witnesses, as established in the Old Testament. In Matt. 18:15-17 Jesus says, “¹⁵ If your brother or sister sins, go

and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”, The third step of confrontation, established in the Matthew reading is to tell the church, so that they can all confront the person and call him to repentance.

It isn't lightly done, but the principle is necessary to ensure that leaders can be held to account especially if what they teach doesn't seem to be scriptural, or their behaviour doesn't conform to their calling.

So finally we see that we need to think about leadership seriously. Might God be calling you to a leadership role, and if so do you fulfil the criteria? Then we have leaders, in Andrew particularly but also in PCC in youth work, in the different communities. Before you grumble about them, pray for them, because they have stepped up to a challenging role.

Let us have a moment or two in prayer. Think about your attitude to leaders in the church. Say sorry if you feel you've been unnecessarily critical. Pray for them. Not just now but always, so we can learn better how to be the body of Christ in Kenilworth.