

Three Ideas For Encouraging Church Leaders  
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- The old cliché about being a leader is “It’s lonely at \_\_\_\_\_ (the top).”
- While that may be a cliché and overused...take it from a leader...it can be TRUE
- Over the years I’ve been privileged to get to know H.B. London, VP of Pastoral Ministries at Focus on the Family.

Based on surveys he has seen and done, H has been quoted as saying:

*“At least 70 percent of pastors in the United States claim they have no friends; 80 percent of North American pastors feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastors; 90 percent say the hardest thing about ministry is dealing with uncooperative people.”*

As we continue our study in the book of 1 Corinthians, the timing for this week’s lesson on Encouraging our Leaders couldn’t be better. As you all know, this coming week our Pastor will be leading the Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando as he finishes his second term as President. It’s the perfect time for us to be reminded by Paul about how we can ENCOURAGE those who take leadership roles in the church.

Remember last week’s lesson was on UNITY in the church and not having divisions and bickering and I said then that THIS CLASS is a wonderful example of being UNIFIED. Let me begin this lesson by saying as I did last week, THIS CLASS is a wonderful example of ENCOURAGING YOUR LEADER. I’m grateful to God for that. Still, even if we tend to be pretty good at something...scripture is here to remind us and that’s what this lesson will do.

You’ll recall from last week’s overview on 1 Corinthians, this is a letter Paul is writing to a church he helped to found that has gotten off track. They’ve slipped into some very bad practices and have been SPLIT by division among them. They had apparently also slipped into CRITICIZING LEADERS instead of ENCOURAGING THEM and Paul is writing to give them guidance in that area.

- The first way we can ENCOURAGE Church Leaders is to REFUSE TO BE CRITICAL.

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

1So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

- Look at verse 1: Paul says true church leaders are to be regarded as SERVANTS of CHRIST
- The translation here is “under rowers”
- Remember those movies where you see the ship with the slaves down in the bottom of the ship? What are those slaves doing? ROWING
- Not the CAPTAINS of the ship but the SLAVES...that’s how Paul described himself, and Peter, and Apollos. SERVANTS.
- Back to verse 1: SERVANTS of CHRIST who have been entrusted with what? “the secret things of God” The ESV: “stewards of the mysteries of God.”
- What is a STEWARD? Someone who manages something owned by someone else.
- Who is a STEWARD supposed to please? The MASTER.
- The whole focus of the STEWARD is to please THE MASTER...not the other stewards; not the members of the household; but THE MASTER...in this case God.
- Church leaders aren’t supposed to be POPULAR but FAITHFUL to THE MASTER
- Paul says church leaders have been put in charge of managing something very valuable...the “mysteries of God”
- Last week we talked about how the message of the Gospel is perceived by a pagan...what did we say the Gospel is to a pagan? FOOLISHNESS
- Only when God OPENS THE EYES of a pagan does that FOOLISHNESS begin to make sense. So the SECRETS or MYSTERIES of God here is what? The Gospel

1 Corinthians 2:7 says,

7No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

- So, Pastors and Church Leaders are Servants of God who have been entrusted with the message of the Gospel and whose objective is to PLEASE THE MASTER...God himself
- Verses 3 and 4 – If I’m focused on pleasing the master how should I feel about the opinions of anyone else? Paul says “I care very little if I’m judged by you; or any human court; or even myself.”...only what God thinks.
- That can be hard to do though. We all like to be LIKED.
- Paul is saying to the church at Corinth, your church leaders are not there to be POPULAR they are there to be FAITHFUL...therefore when you are making JUDGEMENTS about your church leaders what should we do?
- Look at verse 5 – a three-fold REBUKE according to Warren Wiersbe. You are judging God’s servants:
  1. At the wrong time
  2. By the wrong standard
  3. With the wrong motive

1. Judging God's servants at the wrong time – God will judge His servants when He returns one day, that's HIS JOB. How many times to church members PLAY GOD in judging church leaders?

1 Samuel 16:7 says...

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

- Who was the Lord talking to Samuel about? David.
  - Samuel saw a young boy...but God saw a MIGHTY KING
2. Judging God's servants by the wrong standard – Question: What is the only standard we should use in evaluating if a church leader is doing what they are supposed to be doing? The only standard that applies is "what is written in the word of God."
    - "I don't agree with that decision." Okay...based on what verse of scripture?
    - "I don't think we ought to do it that way." Chapter? Verse? Translation?
    - "I don't think God is honored by what these leaders want to do." Based on what passage?
  3. Also, Wiersbe talks about judging God's servants with the wrong motive
    - Question: When someone is criticizing a church leader, what's their motive? Is it to further the cause of Christ or to grind a personal axe?
- But wait a minute Allen. Hold the phone. Are you saying we don't have a responsibility as church members to hold leaders accountable? To never raise a question? That's how CULTS get started!
  - That's not what I'm saying. That's not what PAUL is saying.
  - Church leaders MUST accept CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM that's given with the right motive and with the right spirit. Based on these first five verses of 1 Corinthians 4 what should we do?
  - If we can't know the church leader's heart...only God can...what should we do? Ask God to "bring to light what is hidden in the darkness and expose the motives of men's hearts."
  - When we're inclined to criticize church leadership what's the standard we should use? God's word.
  - When we're inclined to criticize church leadership we should ask: "What is my motive?" The kingdom of God or my personal agenda?
  - So what is the OPPOSITE of CRITICISM? ENCOURAGEMENT.

The first way we ENCOURAGE Church Leaders is to refuse to be CRITICAL asking God to judge their hearts; using scripture to measure their actions; and checking our own motives.

## 1 Corinthians 4:9-13

9For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. 10We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! 11To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

New International Version (NIV)

- Last place in line; condemned to die; “fools for Christ”; “brutally treated”; “scum of the earth”
- Wow! That will make you want to be a church leader, huh?
- Not much of a RECRUITING POSTER for being a church leader
- Do you know the slogan: “The FEW; The PROUD; The BRAVE”...(The Marines)
- This one is like: “The LAST; The FOOLS; The SCUM”...Church Leaders!
- Question: Paul is being sarcastic here, but what is he saying about the job of church leaders here? Church leadership is hard work and can be a thankless job.
- Paul wasn’t complaining, he was just telling it like it is.
- Christian leadership is COSTLY and exposes the leader to a lot of UNWARRANTED CRITICISM.
- Being a leader in the church isn’t a job for the “faint of heart”.
- You know sometimes we see someone doing a particularly difficult job and we say “Man, I’m glad THEY do that job...I WOULDN’T WANT THAT JOB!
- I think of HEALTHCARE professionals. I think of POLICE OFFICERS and MILITARY PERSONNEL.
- I also think of Pastors and other church leaders and say THANK YOU LORD for those who are FAITHFUL and TRUE to God’s purpose.
- Question: How is Paul teaching us to RESPOND when we see what a hard job our church leaders have? Any ideas/thoughts?

The second way we can ENCOURAGE our church leaders is to RECOGNIZE how hard their job is, and APPRECIATE their SERVICE.

Let’s look at verses 14-20...

## 1 Corinthians 4:14-20

14I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. 15Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

18Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. 19But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. 20For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

New International Version (NIV)

- Verse 14: Paul says I'm not picking on you or trying to SHAME you.
- How does he say he's writing these words to them (last few words of verse 14). As a LOVING FATHER.
- Paul was there SPIRITUAL FATHER. God used him to START this church in Corinth.
- Verse 15: Paul says "you may have 10,000 guardians" but you only have ONE FATHER.

The Life Application Study Bible gives some perspective:

*"In Paul's day, a guardian was a slave who was assigned as a special tutor and caretaker of a child. Paul was portraying...his special role...(more than a caretaker). Because he started the church, he could be trusted to have its best interest at heart.*

- Apparently lots of people in the church were voicing their opinions and trying to run things. Paul was saying these tough things to them because his agenda was God's agenda: UNITY in the church.
- Hopefully, all of us are blessed with someone in our lives who will tell us the truth and whose only agenda is what's best for us! Sometimes that's your father...sometimes someone else.
- Look at verse 16. Father's Day is coming up. Dads...if we are the kind of fathers we are supposed to be, what should our children do? IMITATE US.
- Paul says, as your SPIRITUAL LEADER I'm challenging you to IMITATE ME.
- Why would they have been able to feel comfortable imitating Paul?

If we jump ahead to 1 Corinthians 11 Paul will write:

1Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

What a great TEST for church leaders!

If a church leader appears to strive to IMITATE CHRIST then we can feel good about imitating that leader.

Our Explore the Bible Leader Guide puts it well:

*A focus on Christ often gets lost when churches become embroiled in disputes. If Christians remembered that their calling is to be like Christ, their pride and selfish anger would dissipate.*

That line is worth repeating: *We cannot hurtfully criticize one another and be Christ-like at the same time.*

- Verse 17. Paul says, “to be sure you get this I’m sending Timothy as my representative to reinforce my guidance.”
- The rest of the verses in this section (18-20) contain some TOUGH TALK!

The Message paraphrase renders it this way:

*1 Corinthians 4:18-21 (The Message)*

*18-20 I know there are some among you who are so full of themselves they never listen to anyone, let alone me. They don't think I'll ever show up in person. But I'll be there sooner than you think, God willing, and then we'll see if they're full of anything but hot air. God's Way is not a matter of mere talk; it's an empowered life.*

- Look at verse 20: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.”
- What does that verse say to you about who you should listen to?
- That’s another good test of separating those who like to run their mouth from REAL SPIRITUAL LEADERS.
- Are they just a lot of “talk” or do you see any evidence of the POWER of God in their lives?

Matthew 7:21-23 (New International Version) Jesus said...

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

John MacArthur writes:

*Spiritual character is measured not by the impressiveness of words, but in the power of the life.*”

- Paul was saying: “Don’t let this church be divided by LOUDMOUTH trouble makers with their own agenda. Don’t imitate a leader unless they imitate Christ!”
- And in case the church was unsure if Paul meant business about this

*Verse 21 (still in The Message paraphrase)*

*21 So how should I prepare to come to you? As a severe disciplinarian who makes you toe the mark? Or as a good friend and counselor who wants to share heart-to-heart with you? You decide.*

Leaders are human and imperfect just like we’re ALL imperfect.

But THE REAL DEAL in church leaders will be challenging us to BE MORE LIKE CHRIST.

- Back to the Dads. When you set a good example for your children and they don’t follow that example and IMITATE it...how does that make you feel? DISCOURAGED.

- So what would ENCOURAGE a church leader? For the church to ACCEPT his/her GUIDANCE.

That's the third way we can ENCOURAGE church leaders. By ACCEPTING THEIR GUIDANCE to be MORE CHRISTLIKE.

So, what's THE TAKEAWAY?

- The first way we ENCOURAGE Church Leaders is to refuse to be CRITICAL asking God to judge their hearts; using scripture to measure their actions; and checking our own motives.
- The first way we ENCOURAGE Church Leaders is to refuse to be CRITICAL asking God to judge their hearts; using scripture to measure their actions; and checking our own motives.
- The second way we can ENCOURAGE our church leaders is to RECOGNIZE how hard their job is, and APPRECIATE their SERVICE.
- The third way we can ENCOURAGE church leaders is by ACCEPTING THEIR GUIDANCE to be MORE CHRISTLIKE.
- And a great TEST of whether a church leader is worthy of IMITATION is whether they guide us to IMITATE CHRIST and whether God's POWER is evident in their lives...and NOT JUST A LOT OF TALK!

Finally, as we think about Pastor Johnny and his leadership role in the Southern Baptist Convention this coming week, let's close praying that he will be strengthened and given unusual wisdom and clarity for the task at hand.