

THE MARKS OF GODLY LEADERSHIP
1 CORINTHIANS 4:14-21

Leadership is not optional. It is essential. Take away leadership and vision wanes and people will drift away.

What kind of leader ought we to be? What does God expect of leaders?

Leadership is influence — that's a good, one-word definition. More narrowly, leadership is influence that leads others to follow Christ. Influencing others to obey God's Word and be godly. It is godly influence. We are not talking about personality or temperament or style.

Male leadership begins in Genesis — there we find the equality of men and women, each made in God's image; but there is not equality in roles. Man is given headship from the very beginning, and woman is given the role of helper. Man was created first, woman was taken out of man, man was given the responsibility of naming woman, and man was held accountable after the fall, not woman. Man is given the responsibility of leadership. It's based on God's sovereign order of creation (cf. 1 Tim. 2).

Male leadership is not a result or consequence of the fall. God gave him that role prior to the fall. The bottom line = men are to lead. Men can exercise that leadership wrongly, and 1 Cor. 4 will help us.

Context: the final contrast between the apostles and the Corinthians and Paul's confrontation of them over his apostleship. The arrogance of the Corinthians is depicted in vv. 6-8. They have misunderstood the gospel and loved worldly wisdom. Paul has spent four chapters on the issues of divisiveness and is concluding his argument. The way Paul confronts them demonstrates what a godly leader should be like. This applies to all forms of male leaders. [Note that Paul was demonstrating this leadership in a problematic church.]

Four characteristics of godly leadership.

1. Concern

We lead out of genuine concern for the people we lead (v. 14). To this point, Paul has been fairly sharp, but now his tone changes. Paul was not writing to attempt to "move" or "manipulate" the people. That was not his motive. What was his motive then? Out of love for them as a son, despite their problems and waywardness. He had deep love and concern and desired that they would change. He was warning them for their own good.

Admonish is *noutheteō* — to place into the mind the truth of God. It is both a warning and an admonishment. He was bringing truth to their minds to see what they really were. His rebuke is proof of his love for them (Prov. 27:5-6). When you genuinely love those who are in your

charge, it establishes involvement in their lives — it is crucial for our effectiveness as leaders.

Note v. 15 — the metaphor of the father. The **tutor** was a guardian — a slave that was the constant attendant of the child. He was over the child's education, for instance. He accompanied the child throughout the day. The slave could chide the child, and protect the child from evil influences. He nursed the child when the child was sick. The Corinthians may have had many such tutors in their lives, but few fathers. They did not have the intimacy of a father. The slave was expendable, but not the father. Paul loved them in a way that many of their teachers did not. He was the instrument that God used to bring them to Christ.

He came as the father of **beloved children**. He is a true spiritual leader, possessing love for the people he is leading. He is not in it for what he receives. He is not desiring to lead for recognition, glory, or perks. He leads because he has joy in self-sacrifice and preferring other people over himself and being devoted to others. This is the over-riding motive of all leaders (aside from leading for the glory of God).

It is understood that a father should truly love his family. He leads in providing, protecting, caring, training his family. He does these things out of love for those God has given him.

Without this, our leadership degenerates to something else — domineering dictatorship (rough and unkind, harsh, demanding, impatient), or the leadership is totally non-existent. In either case, the man is not motivated by concern for people — he is motivated by concern for self. Both dictatorship and absence of leadership are selfish forms of leading.

Care for people and love them. Be gracious in the pastorate. *Until we are moved by compassion and concern for the ones God has given us, we are not ready to lead and minister.*

This necessitates that we are people persons. Note 1 Thess. 2:5-8 — “we gave our very own lives.” That's how they knew Paul. There is inherent authority in leadership. But they are not to lord it over the sheep (1 Pt. 5). A leaders has to love people. He can't be controlling and domineering, preaching constantly about his authority. That man doesn't understand the difference between a shepherd and a cowboy — a cowboy drives cattle, a shepherd leads sheep.

2. Character (v. 16)

This means personal integrity. He exhorts them to be **imitators of me**. Cf. also 11:1 — the added phrase, **just as I am also of Christ**. His goal is to make followers of Christ. This is not an arrogant statement, but it is a bold statement. If others examine his life, they will find Christlikeness.

Can I say that? Can I say, “I want you to examine my life and then seek to imitate the things that I do and say, for in doing that I know you will learn how to follow Christ.” This is the controlling verse in this section. Integrity contains the idea of wholeness — there is consistency throughout the day in every aspect of life. Cf. Ps. 15:2.

It is one thing to *imagine* this about yourself. Can you point to others around you who know you

best and ask them and they will affirm this? In v. 17, Paul asserts that Timothy will vouch for his integrity. When Timothy arrives, ask him anything you want. He will vouch for what I am asking you to do. Paul's reputation was impeccable and stellar. This is critical for a leader.

Are you consistent in your character no matter where you are and what you are doing? Can you say, "ask my wife...ask my children?" Do your family members have a respect for you about your habits? Can children emulate your life through your example?

Consistency will breed trust in you as a leader. Trust is the result of making right decisions and choices daily and then doing that over a long period of time. Truth and time go together. It takes a long time to build trust and only a moment to lose it.

Cf. Eccl. 10:1 — a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor. A little can destroy the whole — a bad, foolish choice is weightier than honor. Build and guard it! Never stop guarding.

We are not talking about perfection. But there should be the direction of deliberate steps to godliness, proving the consistency of our integrity. We build trust by handling a failure humbly and with teachability.

3. Courage (vv. 17, 19, 21)

Remember 1 Cor. 16:13 — ***act like men*** or "be brave." Josh. 1:7-9 (LXX) uses the same word. Courage is inherent in masculinity. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the desire and willingness to pay the price for truth. A godly leader can never compromise what is right. He is willing to pay the price for what is right. So courage is characterized by action, not maintaining status quo, but taking risks. Can't be programmed by fear of failure or being hurt.

Leaders show initiative to solve problems. Note v. 14ff — I'm writing...I've sent Timothy...I will come soon. There is aggressiveness in leadership. He is vulnerable but also bold, especially when it comes to being problem solvers. He goes after problems and solves them. He attacks the problems. Godly leaders don't run from problems and controversies. A leader is determined to do what he believes is right. He will take specific steps to go the right direction.

A leader is not passive. There are many passive fathers and husbands. That's not godly leadership. A leader is determined, no matter the obstacles. Note Paul's plans in 1 Cor. 16:5ff (esp. v. 9 — ***wide door...adversaries***). He didn't run from problems. He is not passive.

Am I willing to show initiative to solve problems when they arise in the home, or do I punt to my wife? Does she show more initiative than I do? She may have skills, but that does not alleviate my responsibility to lead her.

There is also with this a sense of determined duty — it is my duty at home and in the church. There is an aggressiveness to solving problems — godly leaders don't run from problems and they don't quit in the middle of the problems.

In verse 21, he is willing to come gently, but he is also willing to deal with a problem with

aggressiveness and courageous boldness. He is discerning.

He is also decisive. He has to be willing to make a decision. He is not rash, but once he has data, he has to be decisive. He needs to seek knowledge. Study, get facts, appropriate biblical principles, get counsel, pray for wisdom. People follow because we have insight and then make good decisions. Good leaders make good second decisions.

A good leader has principles and convictions based on true biblical teaching. He is not wishy-washy. He has thought through the truth and he does not violate those principles when he makes his decisions. Know what you believe and then show initiative in making decisions.

4. Contentment (vv. 18-19)

Context: Paul had to deal with the results of false teachers who questioned his apostleship and attempted to undermine his authority. They characterized him as being a weak person; they accused him of being uncaring and not following through on promises.

The sending of Timothy could have been interpreted by false teachers as Paul being unwilling and afraid to come to Corinth. But this was not to be understood that he was running from problems. He *did* make plans to come to them soon. But his qualification, *if the Lord wills* is a demonstration of his trust in God and willingness to do whatever God wants.

Paul made his plans and was determined to reach his objectives, but whatever God allowed and decreed was best, so Paul was willing to submit to the sovereign decrees of God. The sovereignty of God is a crucial doctrine! There have been allusions to this throughout this passage. He trusted what God was going to do in Corinth. He was willing to submit to whatever Christ would bring into his life. He accepted the overruling authority and power of God in his life. Note the same principle in 1 Cor. 16:7.

Paul lived his life as an even-keeled man who was content. Cf. Phil. 4:10ff. Paul majored in Trials 101 — and that was how he learned contentment. We learn contentment through trials and difficulty. He understood God's process and He embraced God's will for his life. He did not prefer one method over another. And he was dependent on God's strength and chose to exhibit God's love for others. He was more concerned about others than himself. People who are focused on themselves are not very content.

Paul was willing to allow his own purposes, plans, and duty to be superseded by the providence of God. He trusted God at all times, which allowed him to be content at all times. Trust and submission are connected.

A spiritual leader is not one who is self-willed (stubborn). A spiritual leader lives his life under the awareness that God is in control and he is happy with that, resulting in contentment. Leaders who are irritated and angry attempt to force their plans on others. And when people oppose or the circumstances of life intervene to oppose it, they become angry, irritated and discouraged and depressed. People *love* to follow leaders like that. Its Eeyore-ian leadership.

A spiritual cannot be living under the circumstances all the time. That becomes burdensome on the others he is leading.

People need a leader that revels in the sovereign leadership of God. People need leaders like that in the world we live in right now. Don't succumb to all that is said on the political talk programs. Model confidence and trust in God that is not effected by life and circumstances. Whatever the Lord wants, that's what we want.

Am I known as one that is determined and courageous, showing initiative, and at the same time content? Do I willingly defer to the providential leadership of God? Am I content with what He does, or am I irritable when my plans do not work out? We need to mentor the sheep in this. Mentor them in being content with the providence of God.

Concern. Character. Courage. Contentment.

You may be able to say more about leadership, but you cannot say less than this about leadership.