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Church Leaders, Part 2

How many of you know where the Shema is located in Scripture? [Deuteronomy 6:4-7] Or the Magnificant? [Luke 1:46-55] Or where the Great Commission can be found? [Matthew 28:18-20]

Most of us know where the Great Commission is found and what it says:

Matthew 28:18-20: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

You may or may not know this, but this commission was given NOT to the individual Christian, BUT to the formal body of Christ, which means this is a commission of the church, the corporate body of Christ. In this regard, what do you suppose is the commission of a church leader? If you think it is to spearhead the Great Commission, you would be wrong.

1 Corinthians 4 details the anatomy of a church leader. This particular text addresses the commission of the church leader. However, before we get there, let me summarize what we saw last time. The first thing we saw was the church leader's conflict.

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

Paul addressed how he wanted people to view him because he was being attacked by the very people/church he ministered and founded on his Second Missionary Journey. Truly, this is part and parcel of ministry. Think of it:

- The flesh is at enmity with Christ- *even in the believer*, Galatians 5:17.
- Accordingly, if someone is ministering in the name of Christ amongst believers, at times they will receive blows intended for the Lord, John 15:20.

From this and many other passages, we saw that a mark of a faithful church leader is persecution from the very ones they have been called to serve.

Secondly, we noted the concern of the church leader.

1 Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man regard us in this manner [By way of note, the officer must give himself to what follows so much that it becomes his "reputation" amongst the genuine servant of the Lord- that is the idea by the expression, 'Let a man regard us in this manner...' So how ought everyone to view a church leader? They must see that he is...], as servants of Christ..."

The "servant of Christ" speaks first and foremost to the Leader's Concern, specifically doing and upholding the will of their Lord, which includes the glory of God and His people.

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.”

A faithful church leader is driven by the concerns which drive Christ!

The third point was the church leader’s commission.

1 Corinthians 4:1, “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God”

The word “steward” was a broad term in Paul’s day used of a person in a position of trust but accountable to others. The Greek is οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) which is a compound word, οἶκος (*oikos*) a word for house or dwelling and νόμος (*nomos*) which is the word for law. Together the idea is “house law” or someone charged with keeping the law/order/affairs of a household.

“Steward” refers to a person who supervised a large estate. In Paul’s day, a rich landowner typically “employed” someone to do the routine work of running his estate. This deputy was called an *oikonomos* (cf. Luke 16:1) and oft-times was himself a slave. And so, as an overseer of the household, he was called master; as a man subject to the owner, he was called a slave. Perhaps the closest position matching this concept in our day is that of a butler. When you visit a large mansion and Jeeves answers the door he takes your hat and coat, ushers you to the waiting room, and offers you that which is necessary to make you comfortable while you await the master. From all outward appearances, he is kind, gentle, maybe even a little passive. But that is only the impression he gives. Do something that violates the will of his master, and Jeeves becomes as Gandalf, “You shall not pass!” This is the essence of the calling of a steward!

Now in the case of a church leader the text says that he is charged with “the mysteries of God” (μυστηρίων θεοῦ)!

This word “mystery” (cf. also Ephesians 5:32) is μυστήριον (*mustērion*) from which we get the word “mystery.” In English, a “mystery” is something that is unknown. A mystery novel is a “who-dun-it” type of thing. When the mystery is uncovered, it no longer is a mystery. In the Greek, μυστήριον (*mustērion*) is the exact opposite of how we use the term. It refers to something that formerly was unknown, but now has been made known by divine revelation. Accordingly, it refers to something uncovered, manifested, or revealed!

Ephesians 3:3-5, “...by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.”

That is why when the Bible says that the one who speaks in a tongue “speaks mysteries” we

do NOT conclude from this that he speaks in an unknown prayer language. RATHER, we conclude that he speaks by revelation something he actually understands! That is how the term is used in the Bible. A “mystery” is something given by Divine inspiration and so a revelation of God’s will unto the growth and edification of the body of Christ. It is with this that a church leader has been entrusted! The church leader has been entrusted with the truth, the word of God!

Jude 3, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Clearly the deposit entrusted to all church leaders is the word of God! Dr. John MacArthur put it this way:

The deposit of our lives with God is secure. The question is, how secure is His deposit of truth with us? Christian colleges, seminaries, pastors, and other church leaders who deviate from Scripture, defecting to ‘a different gospel’ and wanting ‘to distort the gospel of Christ’ (Galatians 1:6–7), will face a dreadful day of reckoning before God. The most solemn responsibility that any believer has, especially those the Lord has called to be preachers and teachers, is to uphold and defend the integrity of His Word. (MacArthur, 1995, p. 30)

2 Timothy 1:13-14, “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. [To clarify the exhortation, Paul wanted Timothy to know that this is done “NOT by might or power, but by God’s Spirit,” says the Lord!’ Notice...] Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*.”

The charge given to Timothy was to guard the “standard of sound words” which had been entrusted to him! See, it is easy to take the word of God and deduce all sorts of strange and aberrant teachings. It is the job of church leaders to ensure that the church; specifically, in her worship, pulpit, classrooms, and people- “retains the standard of sound words” given to us in the Bible! In fact, notice, the exhortation involves not only what is professed, but *how one lives*.

1 Timothy 6:20-21, “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you [at first glance, this sounds like a spiritual gift or something; but then we read the rest of the exhortation...], avoiding worldly *and* empty chatter *and* the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’- which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith...”

The exhortation in this passage is broader than what Paul gave in 2 Timothy 1. This would include any aberration of life or doctrine both in the minister as well as the people of God!

Accordingly, Paul wrote...

Philippians 3:17-19, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us [this would include both their lip and their life]. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."

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."

It is the primary duty of church officers to protect "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" which involves both our orthodoxy as well as our orthopraxy! That is their solemn duty!

The call/charge/trust of church leaders it is NOT to:

- Inspire people or make them feel good about themselves.
- Create a new movement.
- Be on the cusp of a new teaching or theology.
- Grow a big church.
- Open the doors and reach out to the multitudes.

This is NOT to say that we shouldn't have a passion for the Great Commission. But get this, that is NOT the leader's job; it's everyone's job! We gather for worship and we scatter for evangelism! Truly, Church Leaders have a more fundamental commission, making sure the body of Christ/the church *maintains* sound doctrine both in what they believe and in how they live it.

Ephesians 4:11-13, "And He gave... pastor/teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith [that's our orthodoxy], and of the knowledge of the Son of God [an ever deepening and growing love relationship with Christ], to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ [that's our orthopraxy]."

The work, purpose, and means have all been laid down for us in God's word. Our call simply is to maintain it and so be faithful to it! I love this! It's NOT doing something great, BUT simply guarding/upholding what has been entrusted to our care- the word in God's people!

Will this be "popular"? No!

There will always be a new-fangled approach toward ministry which will attract the

attention of a consuming public. The church leader in this context undoubtedly will be tempted to embrace “the movement”- no one wants to be a fuddy duddy or archaic. Yet the faithful leader understands that though it be unpopular, his commission is to maintain that which God has given in the word- not just the doctrine, but also the calling and equipping of God’s people!

That’s His Commission- which brings us to his personal individual calling.

1 Corinthians 4:2, “In this case, moreover [“in this connection, then”], it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy”

In the context of the quality of the work of the butler/steward, if the master was to check up on everything he might as well do the job himself. Accordingly, one of THE most important characteristics/qualities of a steward is fidelity- which lays great emphasis on the leader’s personal piety!

This is a huge issue! It is so easy in the context of ministry to put on a show- to play act and so project yourself in a way that is not true. That is what was going on a Corinth with the Super Apostles; today the ministry is rife with this! Recently I was talking with one of my mentors who related to me the following account.

The pastor of a very large church numbering well above 2,000 called a man who would become one of the most amazing shepherds that church had ever known! The news of any one hurting found both he and his wife at their door with food and words of encouragement. He was the first to arrive at the hospital and the last to leave. He taught, served, supported, encouraged, counselled, called, and labored to equip the body. And it wasn’t long before over 2,500 people were talking about this incredible servant of Christ! The church literally was abuzz!

Not surprisingly over the succeeding decade, this pastor went from ministry position to ministry position: assistant youth director... youth director... mission’s coordinator... pastor of spiritual development... and then executive pastor. Sadly around the fifteenth year mark he ran away with another man’s wife. It was awful! He was disciplined and eventually deposed. Yet by God’s grace, his marriage was saved.

Four or five years later, he opened up and related a rather sobering truth. In all the years of his ministry, his delight and joy was NOT the righteousness of Christ, BUT the praise and adulation of the people of God. That is why he did all those things! It wasn’t because he loved Christ or the people. It was because the ministry had become his platform of fulfillment!

This is the same sin into which many a Christian business man falls. He makes his boast the success of his company. If that same man were in ministry, the error he is prone to is

making his boast the success of his ministry! This partly is what Paul meant when he warned about adulterating the gospel ministry (2 Corinthians 2:17)!

My dear brothers and fellow church leaders, “Watch over your heart with all diligence!” (Proverbs 4:23)! In the words of Paul, “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere¹ in these things...” (1 Timothy 4:16)! The temptation for you will be to use the ministry as a platform for self-fulfillment, attention, adulation, or promoting your own agenda! Accordingly, hypocrisy will be a constant threat.

It is between 593 and 586 BC and Ezekiel has been called by God to minister as a prophet in exile! He was quite the orator to whom God’s people would flock to hear (Ezekiel 33:32-33). As a genuine prophet of the Lord, God gave Ezekiel various and sundry visions which enabled him to see what no others saw in his day. One such vision was a glimpse into the *private lives* of the leaders of Israel- the priests and the elders!

On one particular day, Ezekiel in a vision was transported hundreds of miles away to the temple where he saw an Asherah pole, an aberrant and morally depraved Canaanite goddess, set up in the temple (Ezekiel 8:5-6) put there by Manasseh (2 Kings 21:7). This no doubt shocked Ezekiel! How far had God’s worship fallen! Yet in response to Ezekiel’s amazement, God said, “*You think that is bad: that’s just the tip of the iceberg; let me show you more!*”

Ezekiel 8:7-10, “Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, now dig through the wall.’ So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance. And He said to me, ‘Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here.’ So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts *and* detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.”

This is shocking! Evidently not only had an Asherah pole been placed in the temple, but also all sorts of idols and images of perverse and wicked things accompanied it! Yet that wasn’t the worst of it.

Ezekiel 8:11, “And standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel [these were the religious leaders of Judaism at the time], with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them [the idea was that he was standing in the middle leading the worship], each man with his censer in his hand, and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.”

Incredible! The chief leaders/shepherds/care takers of God’s people had given themselves over to the worship of the various and sundry Canaanite idols! Imagine living at this time and beholding such a thing... how discouraging! And yet, it actually wouldn’t have been for, based on the next verse, it turns out these men most likely were doing this NOT literally,

BUT in their hearts/in secret.

Ezekiel 8:12a, “Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images?...’”

They weren’t literally bowing down... but because they were working out their ministry unto self and for self, they were just as guilty as the idolater! We see it all plainly now. These religious leaders had a form of godliness. No one suspected that their service, teaching, sacrifice was done for self-gain or improper motive. And so while they no doubt publically lamented Manasseh’s egregious sins, nevertheless they were guilty of the same and more!

How important it is that church leaders stand vigilant over their hearts and ministry! Stand ever and always watchful!

You say, “*But how will I know I am ministering with wrong motives?*” The fruit you reap in your own lives will show it... especially when the sheep bite you! If you respond with resentment, entitlement, or a sense of moral superiority, you know you have been serving with false motives and therefore your inner sanctum is filled with “every form of creeping things and beasts *and* detestable things.”

Today, seven men enter into a ministry in which they could serve the remainder of their lives! Yet for this to be so, it behooves them and us to strive NOT for great things, BUT simple fidelity to the Lord and His ministry. Recall Christ’s standards:

John 17:4, “I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do.”

Christ’s boast was NOT that He did great things, BUT that He proved faithful to God’s calling! In this context, note the KEY to fidelity as sinful servants of the Lord:

1 Corinthians 4:3-4, “But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you [recall, that is what the Corinthians were doing... they were having roast-Paul and so eating him up], or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself [this doesn’t mean he didn’t look to himself; it means that Paul’s hope was not based on his own self-assessment- for his heart most certainly was deceitful]. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.”

This is the key to fidelity in ministry, understanding that it is before the Lord we serve and it is from the Lord we seek adulation/the “well done”! Accordingly, Paul made this incredible statement:

1 Corinthians 3:8, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor."

Jealousy will be a very serious problem in the life of a church leader. Accordingly, we need to ignore outward appearances, ever and always keeping in mind that our reward comes from the Lord! It doesn't matter what others say or do... we stand before the Lord! Thus, after his exhortation to any and all church leaders, Peter gave this word of encouragement:

1 Peter 5:4, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."-

Fellow leaders, let not our reward be the praises of men, their approval, or their endorsement... may it be the Lord alone to whom we look!

So church leaders

- Will be persecuted by the very ones they've been called to serve.
- Must ever and always be driven out of love for Christ and therefore His Concerns- not the people, society, or the passions and desires of another minister of Christ.
- Must give themselves to THE deposit given to us in the word and so the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of God's people individually and corporately!
- In and through all things, they must strive unto personal fidelity to the Lord in all things! The church leader therefore must not be about doing great things, but simply fulfilling the calling placed on their life- "content to fill a little space, if God be glorified!"

In light of this, it behooves the body of Christ

- To pray and work for such men.
- To abandoned the pattern for leadership that has become the standard in consumer churches- good looking men who are successful in business and life. Nothing wrong with this; it just isn't the standard!
- To expect and so encourage each other unto the caricature laid down in this and other passages!

Such leadership is a gift! Let us greedily hold on to this gift as long as the Lord provides!

Bibliography

MacArthur, D. J. (1995). *1 & 2 Timothy MacArthur New Testament Commentary Set*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

End Note(s)

¹ ἐπιμένω (*epimenō*)- persistently remain in these things; don't ever stop examining both your ministry and your character.