

3. The leader whom God wants

7/9/2020

There are a lot of differences between the Viet Nam war and the Desert Storm. The former lasted over a decade, the latter one a few months. The Viet Nam war was disastrous, many of our soldiers were killed, injured, and maimed. However, the Desert Storm was decisive, short, and victorious.

What was the difference between these two wars? The leadership. The leaders who led the war during the Viet Nam war were politicians who did not know anything about military strategies. They were the ones who decided which hills to take or which areas to bomb. Because of their stupidities, many of our young people lost their lives. These politicians were more concerned about their popularity with the people at home than winning the war and the lives of our soldiers in the combat zone.

Contrary to that, the Desert Storm was led by the people who knew what they were doing, such as, the late General H. Norman Schwarzkopf. The politicians had learned to take a side step so that these two generals could run the show. The result was stunning and phenomenal.

This is an excerpt from one of Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf's speeches:
"I've met a lot of leaders in the Army who were very competent – but they didn't have character. And for every job they did well, they sought reward in the form of promotions, in the form of awards and decorations, in the form of getting ahead at the expense of someone else, in the form of another piece of paper that awarded them another degree – a sure road to the top. You see, these were competent people, but they lacked character.

I've also met a lot of leaders who had superb character but who lacked competence. They weren't willing to pay the price of leadership, to go the extra mile because that's what it took to be a great leader.

And that's sort of what it's all about. To lead in the 21st century – to take soldiers, sailors, airmen into battle – you will be required to have both character and competence."

Some of you might say, "I am not a leader." But we all fall into the leadership role one way or another – at home, at the workplace, or the church or wherever. It is good for us to learn how to be a good leader according to God's way.

The legendary football coach of the Dallas Cowboys, the late Tom Landry told about a leader: "The leader is the one who makes his people do what they hate to do to get what they always want to have."

Simply put, leadership is an "inspiring influence." It is the ability to ignite a blazing desire within people to do things they never imagined possible. It is rallying a defeated army to a crack commando for future victory. In business, a good leader can stimulate high morale and willing sacrifice. In a family, strong character, and lasting unity. That is what leaders do.

Yet one common thread appears to run through the fabric of them all: Leaders have the ability to get along well with people.

We are going to learn about the leader whom God wants from this open letter of the apostle Paul to the people of Thessalonica who showed the character and competence in God.

A. BEATEN, BUT NOT CRUSHED

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our visit with you was not without result. 2 On the contrary, after we had previously suffered and been outrageously treated in Philippi, as you know, we were emboldened by our God to speak the Gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition.

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

In Philippi, despite being Roman citizens, they had been publicly stripped and beaten and thrown into prison without a trial according to Acts 16:19-24. It was an outrageous and humiliating injustice. Yet, in the confidence of God, they pressed on and boldly preached His truth in Thessalonica.

It would have been easy for most of us to take a vacation from the wounds from Philippi or call it quits. But Paul was courageous and was not a quitter.

This kind of hindrance or persecution could disable many of us. But disabilities don't have to be a disqualification. Many times they can be a platform from which we can point others to the Lord.

B. THE THINGS THE LEADERS SHOULD NOT DO

1 Thessalonians 2:3-6 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. 4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

What do you get out of this?

The apostle Paul points out to us that there are 4 things leaders should not do:

1) Leaders should not be deceptive. – v3

Paul's message was simple and upfront. Without any ulterior motives, he spoke to them as a man of integrity.

2) Leaders should not be people-pleasers. – v4

Although leaders must be able to get along well with people, they must avoid becoming people-pleasers. Because people pleasers are motivated by insecurity. When controversial issues arise, they try to sit on both sides of the fence instead of making the necessary decisions. To keep the peace, they hedge on the truth. To duck criticism, they say what people want to hear. In the end, they lose the respect of others – and themselves.

Of course, this perspective doesn't imply that we can thumb our noses at people or, worse yet, run over them in the name of truth. Rather, it gives us the confidence to do what is right before God and let public opinion fall wherever it may.

No one who sticks his wet finger up in the air to see where the public opinion winds are coming from would ever be a good leader.

3) Leaders should not be covetous. – v5

I once read that a flatterer is a person who manipulates rather than communicates. A flatterer can use either truth or lies to achieve his unholy purpose, which is to control your decisions for his own profit.

Covetousness is the consuming desire to have more than we need and to yearn for the possessions of others.

The city of Thessalonica sat on the Egnatian Way, the famous highway that went east to west through Macedonia. Thessalonica was also an important port and a melting pot city with cultures from all over the world. There was a staggering variety of religions and religious professionals in Thessalonica. In this city, you would find the worship of the gods of the Olympian pantheon, especially Apollo, Athena, and Hercules. There were the native Greek mystery religions, celebrating Dionysis and the sex and drinking cult. The Greek intellectual and philosophical traditions were also represented. There were shrines to many Egyptian gods: Isis, Sarapis, Anubis. Also present were the Roman State cults that deified the political heroes of Rome. There were also the Jewish people and the God-fearing Gentiles.

Most of these false religions were missionary-minded and sought to spread their faith using their silver-tongued missionaries. Most of these missionaries were opportunists, who took everything they could from their listeners, and then moved on to find someone else to support them.

Paul didn't want the people of Thessalonica to think that he was one of those get-rich-quick evangelists.

4) Leaders should not be authoritarian. – v6

Although Paul, as an apostle, had the right to demand first-class treatment, he didn't take advantage of that privilege. Instead, he humbly served the Thessalonians.

Abusing authority is a particularly powerful temptation for spiritual leaders because their position, their verbal ability, and their knowledge of Scripture can awe people. Followers who tend to pedestalize their leaders may feel obligated to protect them and allow them greater authority. Leaders soon discover that they can get away with being bossy, but that's not modeling a servant's attitude. But the servant-leaders know themselves well enough to put the brakes on their authority when pride starts to take control.

I've seen some leaders who started humbly, but they became enormously arrogant snobs as their ministries grew, like king Saul. They have been too busy reading their own clippings.

C. THE THINGS THE LEADERS SHOULD DO

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. 8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; 11 as you know how we exhort-

ed, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

This time the apostle Paul points out to us that there are 4 things leaders should do:

1) Leaders should be sensitive to needs. – v7

Like a nursing mother, Paul gently and tenderly cradled these infant believers, nourishing them with his own life and the pure milk of God's Word like mentioned in 1 Peter 2:2. Selflessly, he committed himself to understand their hopes and fears so he could meet their deepest needs. Such sensitive leadership cannot happen from emotional detachment. It requires personal involvement and love.

2) Leaders should be affectionate for people – v8

Sensing Paul's love for them, the believers in Thessalonica didn't feel used or manipulated. Paul wasn't tossing them from one objective to another. And they could get close to him. He didn't maintain a "professional distance."

Again, I've seen one too many church pastors keeping their so-called professional distance with their congregation. I understand that no one person can handle many hundreds and thousands of people, but they shouldn't act like they are a class above anyone else. If they don't want to hang around the people to whom they minister, they shouldn't be in ministry.

3) Leaders should be transparent in life. – v9-10

Even though the Christians in Philippi sent financial help according to Philippians 4:15-16, Paul still made tents and paid his own way. No one could accuse him of using his ministry for his own profit. Later on, Paul used this fact to shame the lazy Christians in the Thessalonian church.

Paul lived the truths of the Gospel in the reality of his own life. He opened up his secrets, his struggles, his scars, and his humanity. There were no two sides in Paul's life. What the Thessalonians saw in Paul from the congregation pews was what they saw on him on the street.

4) Leaders should be enthusiastic in affirmation. – v11

Paul cheered on the Thessalonians. How much do we Christians need this kind of affirmation! We've been beaten with our unworthiness and sinfulness by satan, fellow Christians, and ourselves until we're black and blue. We need to know we are in Christ and it is His righteousness the Father sees from heaven when we come to ask His forgiveness of our sins. We've got to stop shooting our own wounded and encourage and affirm them instead.

D. THE ULTIMATE GOAL

1 Thessalonians 2:12 we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Paul's leadership style focused on the benefit of those he served that they might follow the Lord and enjoy His presence forever.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Develop inner security in God that will guard you against becoming a people pleaser and keep you confident in the Lord.

2) Commit yourself to excellence in all you do for the name of the Lord

whom we bring glory.

3) Maintain a deliberate and practical faith that takes the initiative in seeking and obeying God.