

Title: Real Leadership, Really

Text: 1 Corinthians 4.14-21

Theme: Raw truths of Leadership

Series: 1 Corinthians #18

Prop Stmt. Christian leadership involves teaching the right beliefs and training the right behavior.

When you decide to be involved in a relationship, you are taking a risk. You risk rejection, loss, pain, hurt, misunderstanding, bitterness and in some cases, personal harm. So much of our lives are spent on developing, managing, breaking or restoring relationships. Some of you probably had a difficult time concentrating on what we sang because your mind is cluttered and/or spinning about a relationship. In fact, some of you probably had harsh words already this morning with someone and you sit here like a wounded soul, trying to hide your sorrow from the penetrating looks of others. Why does anyone get involved in a relationship when there is so much at stake and when so much can go wrong? Why do some people get married five or six times and expose themselves to such complicated anguish? God has made us in His image. We are relational beings. We were made to relate. And even though technology has made it convenient for us to find pseudo relationships, (which is what much of the internet is about), we long for a relationship that will not disappoint or will not hurt us, or will not be taken away from us. The internet can be a good tool for gaining information, but it is such a sad substitute for real life. If you do not like what a person says, you can just log off. If you have to go to the hospital, people in the cyber world will not sit in the waiting room and visit you or take personal responsibility for you. So much of what is called relationships in the internet world is people trying to satisfy a longing for relationship without having to actually relate, solve problems, and be responsible. It makes it easy for people to simply take, but not really have to give. Studies have been done that concluded that the people who spend more time on-line are actually more lonely and depressed than others.

We live in a cynical world because so many people have learned the hard way that others look at them on the basis of what they can get from them. If you do not look out for yourself, no one else will. So, we guard ourselves, pretend, manipulate and hide. The idea that I can live without pretending, that I can find a relationship that is safe and secure remains for many people, only a dream. It may sound glib to say that God loves you. But that truth is anything but glib. God's love is not a one-night stand. God's love is not plastic promises and empty words. The love of God is a love that is so extreme and so sacrificial, Christ died on the cross for you. Christ cared more for you than for his own physical comfort or emotional well-being. Christ spent His life and was poured out in death because that was the only way that your greatest need could be met. Then he said, if you are going to follow me, you have to live like me. The implications for the church are enormous. If we are going to call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ, then part of that calling involves viewing people the way Christ did. He loved them. He told them the truth in love. He cared more about them than He did about what they thought of him. He risked misunderstanding, rejection, and loss. We are the church. We are called to be Christ to our world and to bring life to decaying people. This means that we have to have the right kind of relationships. This means that the leaders have to show the way.

You all may remember that the Apostle Paul had already been to the city of Corinth and was used by God to bring many people to faith in Christ. These people became the core of what is called the church at Corinth. When you become a follower of Christ, your eternal condition is changed instantly, but your present condition changes over time. When a self-centered person comes to faith in Christ, it takes a long time for that person to work out their faith and really address these issues. Paul knows that these believers in Corinth had never seen Jesus, but they had seen him. So, in these verses, while he has to help these believers face their problems and deal with them, he shows us the best way to do it. It starts with having the right perspective or the right attitude. Look at verses 14-15.

1. **Leaders have to care more for the followers than for themselves.** (14-15)

Paul has just been very direct with them and now assures them that his goal is not to shame them and make himself look good. He is seriously interested in helping them. This is absolutely critical for leaders in the church to understand. Whenever you are in a position of leadership realize that some people are going to say things that will hurt. Some people will misinterpret your actions, presume to know your motives and will say some things that are really unkind. It is very easy to think, “I’ll show you.” “I’ll prove it to you.” But it should not be our goal to win the argument but to help people grow. That is how we ought to function even as parents. Do parents generally know more than the kids? Yes! Do kids generally think that their parents know more than they do? No! It is so tempting when you are proven right to rub it in – isn’t it? But does that really help them?

A. **Care assumes selflessness.**

Paul calls these believers “dear children” and he means it. It is not his goal to make them feel bad. Truthfully, they need to feel bad over how they have treated Paul and what they have done to their church, but just making a person feel bad, does not really accomplish all that much. There are many opportunities for you to lead. Parents, you are leaders in your homes. All of us should provide leadership to our world by the manner of our lives. Leadership in a word is influence. How do you influence the people in your family? How do you influence the people that you work with or play with or live with?

You can influence someone through intimidation. That is the “I’m bigger than you so you better watch out” attitude. Some of you live with people who try to lead like that. Some of you work with managers and bosses who act that way. I hope that none of you personally operate like that. There is no place for that in the church because there is no place for that kind of leadership in a Christian. Leaders have to care more for their followers than they do for themselves. That is care that assumes selflessness.

You can influence someone through manipulation. That is the “If you don’t do what I want, then I am going to make life miserable for you” approach. You can influence someone through materialism. That is the “If you do what I want, then I will give you

gifts and goodies.” This, frankly, is another expression of manipulation. It is very interesting to read in study after study, that the happiest businesses, and places where worker loyalty and satisfaction is the highest, is not the places where people are paid the most. It is the places where the people are appreciated and valued. Good leadership involves care that is not driven by looking out for itself, but is looking out for the genuine needs of others. Of course, this demands relationships.

B. Care involves relationship. (15)

The language of v.15, might seem a little foreign to us, so let me explain. A guardian was a person who was hired by the head of an estate (usually the father) to be the personal protector of the father’s child. The guardian was loyal because he was hired. It was his job. He would escort the child to and from school. He would watch over the child and function in many cases like a nanny. He would provide a measure of structure and discipline. But, even though he did all of this, it was not necessarily driven by his deep, abiding passion for the child, but because it was his job. If he received a better offer from another estate owner, he could leave and change jobs. Therefore, during the course of childhood, a child may have several guardians.

Paul is saying, “I don’t care if you have had 10,000 guardians.” The word 10,000 is an expression that is not necessarily limited to 10,000 but can also mean an unlimited or immeasurable amount (see Rev. 5.11). I do not care how many people have influenced you to think this way or that, remember my relationship with you. I am your spiritual father. In other words, I was the one whom God used to preach the gospel to you. Now, even though Paul is reminding them of how they initially met, and what his role was in their life, he is not laying out his apostolic trump card – is he? He is not saying, look I am an apostle, and you have to follow me? He will address that subject later on in this letter – when he has to. But now, he is appealing to the relationship that he has had with these people.

I am pointing this out, not only because it is in the text, but also because this is becoming a huge problem in our culture. We are not very good at relationships. We do not do life together very much. Friday evening I was driving through a section of Detroit known as Mexicantown. Since Bobby is going to Mexico, we wanted to go to an authentic Mexican restaurant. I saw something in the neighborhoods that I rarely if ever see around these eastern suburbs. I saw people sitting on their porches and talking to each other. One of the reasons why there is an attractiveness for Latinos to live near each other, is because life can be done together. One of the problems of affluence is that we tend to treat our homes like gated castles instead of places of life. Look at how many people travel in their cars by themselves. How many of you work in a cubicle, by yourself? How many families have TV’s for each person so that each person can live alone, even though it is supposed to be a family. Houses are more like hotels instead of homes. We are not very good at relationships, but we long for it. It was thought that by now, internet banking and ATM machines would make bank tellers a thing of the past, a relic to be remembered in the Henry Ford Museum. But, an interesting thing has happened in banks. People like the personal touch. I say all of this to point out the obvious. People

long for relationships, but we do not do them very well. Why not? We are too busy!! Shame on us. We need to get serious about this issue of learning how a church does life together. On the leadership level, we are doing a lot of talking about this. In the coming months, we are going to be addressing this more and more. Some of you got a taste of this, this week.

2. **Leaders have to set the pace.** (16-17)

“I urge you to imitate me.” Wow! What a challenge! We often say, don’t follow me, follow Christ. I understand that in theory, but in practice, people can’t see Christ, they can only see you. Live in such a way that you can say, follow me as I follow Christ.

A. By life

Many years ago now, Bobby and I were out in the snow one winter. I looked behind me to see if he was keeping up, and he was trying to step in each of the impressions that my steps had left in the snow. Leaders, parents, believers, we lead, we influence, we set the pace and call for people to walk in our steps. How could Paul say, “imitate me?” He could say it because the people knew how he lived. Leadership in the church, is not done primarily behind closed doors and in secret meetings. Leadership in the church is done primarily through life together. That is why the local church is so important. Shepherds have to smell like sheep. Leaders show the reality of their convictions in their lifestyles. You do not get that from the TV.

B. By action

You can watch church on TV, but you cannot do church that way. Church on TV has directors and editors. The preacher wears make-up to look smooth. The camera does not show the empty seats or the person who is sleeping on the 8th row. The baby that is crying and has to be taken out, or the child who gets unruly and needs to be dealt with is not part of the program, but it is part of life. You can watch church on TV and think – wow, that church is perfect. No, it isn’t – it just has a director and editor. Real life and real church is real. Do we preach one thing and live another?

Paul said, I am sending Timothy back to remind you of how I lived and to remind you of what I taught. Timothy knew how Paul lived, he lived with him. The Corinthians knew how Paul lived, he did it with them. They were able to see the connection between what he did and what he taught. That is a huge part of leadership. We have to live and teach in a manner that is consistent with God’s Word in the context of relationships. That way, people can see the reality of these truths.

I was talking with a couple the other night about some parenting issues, when my son came by the office to tell me something. So, I invited him in and said to the couple, “Ok, I have been telling you these things, but why don’t you ask him, about these things.” This was completely unplanned, but was an opportunity for them to see something that was much closer to reality than having a formal sit down meeting in an office. Most of

life is not lived in formal meetings but in informal life. We can all behave in church for a little while. But when a person lives this at home – the impact is huge. There is another benefit that doing leading by the influence of your life brings. Notice these last 4 verses.

3. **Leaders have to address problems.** (18-21)

What happens when someone tries to fix problems, but they do not have a relationship? It does not work very well does it? Leaders have to address problems. But if a leader has no relationship with his people, if a church is a collection of individuals who do not do life together, then there is no practical foundation upon which problems can be solved. And life has problems and leaders have to address them. Think of it! Why is Paul writing this book? He is writing this to help fix problems in the church. Why didn't Peter write this book or John or James? They did not have a relationship with these people. Now, there are times when a leader has to be comforting (v.14) and times when a leader has to be firm (v.18). Leaders have to address the problems by dealing with the heart.

A. **By dealing with the heart.** (18-19)

What is the sinful attitude that Paul identifies as the cause of so many problems in the church? It is arrogance. By the way, do you think that Paul looked forward to making this trip back to Corinth in order to deal with this? Probably not, but (back to point 1) he cared more for the followers than for himself. He knew what the heart problem was. Relationships in the church are not based on controlling each other's actions. Relationships in the church function on a heart level. There is no other environment in the world that has the capacity to do that.

B. **By dealing with the truth.** (20)

The kingdom of God is not simply words. In the church at Corinth, there were certain teachers who were influencing the church by what they were saying, and we have already seen in some of the previous texts how that they were pitting one part of the church against another part. But, just because you can influence people with words, does not mean that with God, you carry real influence. Is there real power in a person's life to overcome sin? Is there power in a person's life to forgive? Is there power in a person's life to control bitterness and anger? Just because a person is talking the game does not mean that he is living it. That is why, Paul is saying that when he comes back to Corinth, he will find out if these people who are calling themselves leaders are really the right kind of leaders.

C. **By responding with what is needed.** (21)

What do you prefer? A whip or gentleness? Gentleness – of course. But there are times when a leader has to be firm, and there are times when a leader has to be gentle. Paul knew what these believers needed and he was willing to do that. Leadership is not for cowards. Leaders are often misunderstood, maligned, discredited and misquoted. It is

amazing how often people misinterpret your words, or misrepresent you to others who are very eager to believe the worst. You cannot be everyone's buddy. But you can lead the way in life and doctrine.

One of the reasons why we hesitate from relating on a deeper level with each other is because we are afraid of what people will find when they really get to know us. If there is intentional sin in your life and you do not want to forsake that sin, then the thought of relating on a personal level with other believers scares you to death. You can change that and if you call yourself a follower of Christ – you have to. If you are intimidated by what you perceive to be the spiritual level of others who seem to know so much more than you, then the thought of getting to know others is scary because you think that your lack of spirituality will then be obvious. Church is not a spiritual contest, or a place of comparison and competition. The newest believer has just as much a home and place in the body as the most mature of saints. Church life has to be done together. Every congregation has a choice – you can be a bag of marbles or a bag of grapes. In a bag of grapes, we do life together with leaders who care more about their followers than for themselves, who set the pace, and who deal with problems on a heart level.

If you are new to Cornerstone, I want you to know that this is what we strive for. We are not there yet, but we are running that way. There are people who do not want a church like that. They want to be cozy in complacency, and comfortable in their shell. There are plenty of places that call themselves a church who will do that for you. We are not one of them. We are called to authentic life in Christ. It is stretch, but in getting stretched, we have a greater capacity to hold more of His joy and then to reflect more of His glory. I hope and I pray that you will join me on this adventure. Life together in the church is absolutely the greatest!