

What is different about Christian Leadership, and what is the same about Christian leadership? Is Christian leadership just good leadership, or is there something distinctive about it? Is it about leading like Jesus? Yes, but how?

Today we are going to look at some of the advice that the early Christian Apostle Paul gave to his mentoree Timothy about running a church, and quite a bit of this advice is standard leadership advice. Good advice and we are going to look at it, but first I want to ask you. What is distinctive about Christian leaders? In our tribe, Ministers, Elders, Managers.

And I want to say ONE thing. Discerning prayer, the desire to submit all our decisions to God's leadership. That is distinctive to Christian leadership. Character is important, but it's important is all leadership, skills are important, but they are important in all leadership, wisdom is important, but wisdom is something every secular voter will be looking for in the council elections. What is distinctive about Christian leadership, and something Christian leaders can take into the secular workforce – CAREFULLY – is prayerful discernment. A decision might add up in all kinds of ways – but is it what God is leading us to?

Now we might even say Christian leadership follows Jesus in being sacrificial – but even that I would place behind discerning. Because Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice because he discerned God's leading.

Now I know this is fraught, in my own life I do try to follow God's lead, but it is not always easy as a fallen human being to get it right. But the heart of Christian leadership is trying to discern the will of God. That's why I love Presbyterianism, because we believe in plural leadership, in gathering a group of elders together to discern God's will together.

Now I am respectful about other models of Christian organisation, the episcopal model where bishops are consecrated to lead and the congregational model where all the people of God are involved in the detail of discernment. But I believe our model is the strongest and the safest and I rejoice when I see other churches adopt not our names, but our practice, because I believe it is rooted in the scripture.

What is distinctive about Christian leadership, a desire to seek God's voice? Jesus said ***the son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing.*** John 5.19

And every one of you can seek to be a Christian leader like that.

In the Bible Moses was called to a Kingly like leadership, there are times for strong focused leadership, but by Exodus 18 he was wearing himself out in the detail of leadership, and his father in law taught him to appoint judges – leadership over the people so that Moses was free to do the big picture leadership, and to supervise, but not to burn out.

David was the singular good King in the political realm, but the scriptures record a real resistance to the people having a King. In the temple, there was a high priest but that office rotated, and there were a college of priests and high priests. And by Jesus day the synagogue has grown up. When the people of Israel sinned and lost the temple and went into exile in Babylon, how could they worship without the temple, and the synagogue grew up as a place of teaching, centred on the law, the torah rather than the sacrifices. And in Jesus' day the synagogues were strong and they were led by a team of elders, so the early church picked up this model of elders leading a church.

What were the roles, Ephesian Apostles, prophets, Evangelists, teachers and shepherds; but these were ministries I would suggest operating inside and outside the house churches. Paul gives advice to Timothy how to set up a church, not a building, but a people structure that would carry the community forward.

There are 3 words he uses somewhat interchangeably. Deacon- *diákonos* διάκονος, Elder- *Presbuteros* πρεσβύτερος, Overseer- *epískopos* ἐπίσκοπος. That last one become the word bishop but in

Paul's time the idea of a single ruling bishop over a group of people hadn't really developed. It would do by Ignatius time, and Bishops have been very valuable in the church.

But I would suggest that in the early days these three words were pretty close, especially elder and overseer. In 1 Tim 3 Paul basically describes 2 jobs. The overseer – what we have come to see as the elder and the deacon, meaning one who serves, so a slightly more practical role.

Deacon – one who serves. Elder – one who leads and oversees.

In the Presbyterian Church we believe that the role of Priest remains in the Old Testament, that Jesus has become our high priest and that we have no more need of priests to make sacrifices for us. That's why we don't use the term priest, we believe that Christians do not need any mediator between them and God except Jesus Christ. Priest means mediator. Now I don't want to overdo that, of course we can help each other, pray for each other, give advice to each other, but I believe that Jesus is the last priest anyone ever needs.

Similarly, sometimes people will talk about us all being priests, the priesthood of all believers; I have to be a little technical there, it is the priesthood of all believers, not of each believer, AND ALL BELIEVERS because together we are the body of Christ and Jesus inhabits us.

So I believe that God asks us to set apart leaders, to ordain them by prayer and the laying on of hands. I don't believe that there is a magic change to us, but I believe there is a specific empowerment by the Holy Spirit to leadership that comes with that ordination. In the Presbyterians church we ordain our elders, our ministers are a sub-set of our elders. All elders are ruling or leading elders, but some are set apart as teaching elders. Usually it is only teaching elders that celebrate communion and baptism, not because we are spiritually different, it is only a matter of church order, it is because we are training to teach the truth about these things.

You won't often see me wearing a clerical collar, it's not because I am embarrassed of the uniform, and I will wear one at times, it's because I find the collar often creates a barrier, and it can symbolise my catholic brother's theology that says that that something spiritual changes when they were ordained. I don't believe that I the same way they do, yes I believe the spirit does come upon us in a new way, but not that my essence has changed. We don't believe in different orders of Christian.

Now interestingly with our ministers we do believe that there is an unbroken chain between the first apostles and the current ministers, we have not ordained ourselves.

So today we are ordaining some elders, setting them apart to a special task, inviting God's spirit to empower them for office, but not to admit them to a different order.

So what does Paul say? He says choose upright people, in fact his list is not over onerous, people of good character, the list is similar to the sort of qualities expected of a military leader or a midwife at the time. Characteristics of people suitable for public office. I always like to point out that Paul might not have got in if he applied the list to himself, and several of the disciples would have missed out if we are too strict. But I think the list also suggest some basics for how we should lead,

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.

Young people it's good to want to be a Christian leader, trustworthy sayings are usually doctrine – here wanting to be an overseer – it's good.

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, that means they don't have a reputation for trouble. A good reputation and justifiably so.

Faithful to his wife, literally the husband of one wife, even then it's probably not a bar on being remarried but a limit on polygamy, which was an issue among the Greeks.

Temperate, self-controlled, respectable, these are helpful things that we as elders should aspire to generally a managed life.

Hospitable Able to welcome people, *able to teach*, to give advice and teach discipleship.

not given to drunkenness, not boozy parties – Paul will go on to say drink a little wine for your stomach's sake – so you don't have to be teetotal, but not the host of boozy parties

not violent We don't want elders who start fist fights.

but gentle, this is the positive – what is the positive things paul says to look for, look for gentle people. That doesn't mean weak, but calming. Our elder's meetings are places to stay calm.

not quarrelsome, Nor word fights. *not a lover of money*. We always need to protect the church from greed. Sadly, there are many cases of churches being exploited financially

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. Well I've always found that both simple good advice and deeply unfair, because you can't control your kids, you can only do the best you can for them. I think if you create a chaotic household for them that different, but I see this as doing the best you can.

He must not be a recent convert; he/we accept women elders. I will talk about that later in this series. *He must also have a good reputation with outsiders*, to be able to speak into the culture you need some basic respect.

I find this list a helpful questionnaire for people who might be right to serve as elders, but also a basic encouragement for our elders, and leaders, and all of us to cultivate these characteristics.

Now let's mention deacons – in the Catholic Church a deacon is a stage on the way to being a priest. In the Methodist church a deacon is a particularly community facing church leader. In the southern part of NZ, the title deacon is used for what we call the managers and the deacons are ordained to that role of church management.

In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, people with a public office need to be people who are held in common respect.

Sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. So those three characteristics again, honest, sober and trustworthy.

They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. This suggests that all our leaders need to keep deepening their faith and understanding of the faith, so they can pass it on, and answer the hard questions

They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. This is where we get our practice of electing people to office. The Session and the managers cannot just appoint people; they must be elected.

Now thirdly there is a title, the women – this could mean wives – but there is no reference to overseer's wives, so the church came to see this as a title of deaconess. And in this church we have a fabulous history of deaconesses. Before the church was ready to accept women as ministers – the church accepted women as deaconess, often missionaries, often home missionaries, women who would ride around on their bicycles and start Sunday schools and churches fabulous ministers who just didn't have the title in those days.

*In the same way, **the women** are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.* It seems likely that in Paul's day there may have been women involved in these practical ministries, he goes on to talk about looking after widows particularly.

So I've spoken about the role of Christian leadership, let me finish with Christian followership. The bible teaches us to respect our leaders, it talks about making financial provision for certain leaders, and it talks about following their lead and praying for our leaders. So I want to charge you people of St Peters, speak well of your leaders, pray for them, give a share of your wealth towards the support of leaders – we don't pay our elders but we do rely on your faithfulness to pay our staff, and perhaps most of all – when the leaders organise some event makes it a priority to attend, come positive and give of your best. Amen.