



# Leaders Who Last, Go Last

## Introduction:

The Corinthian church didn't understand the true nature of Christian leadership. Instead, they had merely inserted their culture's experience of leadership into their new Christian context, which of course was in opposition to the gospel. Having already exposed their "celebrity" view of their Christian leaders, Paul then moved on to expose some of their arrogance, and tried to redirect their thinking in line with the gospel. His tone in some instances was extremely sarcastic in order to drive home the foolishness of their thinking, while at other times, it was fatherly. This passage serves as a rebuke and an encouragement to the church who needed to understand that spiritual leadership was and still is, servant leadership.

## Today's Scripture Text

### 1 Corinthians 4:1-15

## Sermon Points

### #1. Leaders in the church are servants of the gospel

- Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-6a

Paul reframed their understanding of Christian leadership, by using the words 'servants' and 'stewards', which they would have immediately understood. Both would have conjured up the picture of the low paid, overworked, undervalued and "nothings" of society. However, both servants and stewards were tasked with important roles by those in authority over them, and were relied upon in order to get the job done. In the same way, the apostles and other appointed church leaders were under God's authority, to do the work, while Christ builds his church. In Paul's case, he was given the job of taking the gospel to people, and he was accountable directly to God for this role – and would need to be absolutely faithful to the call and responsibility. As he was on "business" for God, he was extremely careful not to attract any glory or attention to himself by trying to impress the people with whom he shared the gospel.

As a leader in the church he (and all other church leaders) would be accountable to:

- Live a Godly life
- Teach the gospel of Christ, and not myths or high sounding non-sense or worldly philosophy caked in religious language
- Watch his own life very closely



In addition to being a steward and servant of God's message, Paul also had the role of being a spiritual father in the church. It is in this tone that he warns the church of their immaturity and their need to grow. They were focusing on the cultural "fluff" and not the substance of the gospel, which needed to change.

- ♣ Why do you think it would have been so difficult for the Corinthians to see church leaders in the same light as servants or stewards?
- ♣ Why do you think it is so difficult for us in our wealthy, educated culture to see our church leaders as servants and stewards?
- ♣ Why do you think it is so instinctive to human nature to elevate our leaders to a status/stature that God has not given them?
- ♣ What do you think this "celebrity-izing" of our church leaders does to them as people, to their families, friends, and the rest of the church that they are called to oversee?
- ♣ Do you think that our church leaders should be assessed (by use) in terms of their gifting, or ability to impress? Explain your answer.
- ♣ *Personal Reflection: Take a moment to truthfully examine your own hearts on the matter: are you immature like the Corinthians, seeking the glory of being around or under the leadership of the most gifted leaders, or are you mature, knowing that it is far more the character of the leader and their faithfulness to Christ and to the simple gospel message that makes them a good and faithful leader?*

## #2. Pride within a church community sets itself up against servant leadership

- Read 1 Corinthians 4:6b-13

In their glorifying of certain leaders in the church, the Corinthians so revealed their pride. They were no longer focused on the gospel that saved them or about growing the church. As a father, who knew how destructive this root of pride could be, Paul cut them down to size rather sarcastically. He mocked their false sense of self-worship, self-reliance and pride in their spiritual position, which they would have instantly seen as absolutely ridiculous. Paul reminded them that God had actually chosen them because they were nobodies, and had absolutely no reason to boast in anything at all. Paul, even though an apostle, often found himself in impoverished situations, which showed that the gospel was not a means to becoming something that the culture admired or esteemed. Christianity appeared to be a foolish religion, because its followers' lives did not seem to improve by worldly standards. To the on looking world, Christians appeared to incur great cost with little or no reward.

As Christians, we face similar reactions from the world when we are living gospel-centered lives. We are considered narrow-minded, old fashioned, crutch-holding fools, who give large amounts of our money to an "outdated institution". We are considered fools for our morality, backward for our 'old-school' ethics, and idiots for being faithful and reliable in the workplace, or for being 'rule-keepers' in a society of lawlessness. This is part of what walking as a faithful leader in the church looks like. But it is not restricted to church leaders alone, it is the way in which all believers should live. Faithfulness will always cause Christians to respond to the criticism of the world in a Christ-like way, which will always be counter to our own natural nature.



- ♣ What were the Corinthians proud about, and why did Paul rebuke them for it?
- ♣ Why do you think Paul used sarcasm to drive the point home that the Corinthian's were nobodies, in and of themselves?
- ♣ Why do you think it is so important for us to read about Paul's living conditions (sometimes even of poverty), even though he was in one of the highest offices in the church?
- ♣ In what way do you think we, as a church, are at risk of pride?
- ♣ *Personal Reflection: Take a moment to examine your own life: are you living as a faithful follower of Christ? (E.g. Does the world look at you and recognize the way you live as totally different to the culture around you? Is your work ethic high? Do you honour the laws of the land? Do you give to the work of the ministry and to the poor instead of storing all your riches for yourself? Do you live a moral and honourable life both privately and publically? Are you someone with integrity? Do you bless those who mock you for your faith?)*

### #3. How should the church respond?

- Read 1 Corinthians 4:14-15

This passage is a gift from God to the church throughout the ages, because human nature will always repeat the same sinful patterns of pride and people-worship. We need to respond to Paul's fatherly warning, by admitting where we both individually and corporately, have fallen into the same sinful patterns, and repent from those, and then proactively and intentionally strive to cultivate Godly leadership instead. This does not just implicate the elders, but all levels of church leadership. We need to be fully committed to:

- Faithful Biblical teaching across the church
  - Serving – to be faithful to Christ and not for recognition by man
  - Being transparent
  - Continually developing Godly character
- ♣ Why is the call to respond to Paul's letter the same for all levels of leadership in the church?
  - ♣ Why is serving such a key part of being a faithful leader in the church?
  - ♣ Why is it important for us as believers not to stagnate, but to continue to develop Godly character throughout our lives.

*Take Away - What is one big take-away from this passage that God is asking me to apply to my life this week?*