

LEAD BY EXAMPLE NOT BY EXEMPTION

Today's Text: 1 Cor. 9:1-18

Extracts:

My defence to those who examine me is this: do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? ...If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? ... Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. But I have none of these things... for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. ... What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel [1 Cor. 9: 3-6, 11,14-15, 18]

On Wednesday, 13 March 2013, 76-year-old Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergolio of Argentina was elected as Pope Francis, the first non-European in 1,200 years to lead the Catholic Church with a global membership of 1.2 billion.¹ Before moving into the Vatican hotel for the conclave (the secret meeting where Cardinals vote to elect a new pope), he had stopped by a Vatican-owned residence in downtown Rome to pick up the luggage that he had left behind there and offered to pay the bill. Soon after his election, he shunned the special sedan and chose to ride the bus back with the other cardinals. He even refused to mount an elevated platform to greet them. On his recent trip to Brazil, he took his carry-on luggage on board the plane by himself.²

What message is Pope Francis sending out? It is one of simplicity and humility. He has brought to the Vatican the simple life that he had led in Argentina where, as a Cardinal, he rode the public bus to work and cooked his own meals! He has chosen to lead by example, not by exemption. How about you? You may be privileged to lead a family, school, public office, business or church. How do you carry yourself? In this week's Bible verses, Paul vindicated and authenticated his ministry to the church at Corinth by showing that he had preached the gospel without charge. How about you? We all have something to learn from this week's interesting study.

¹ Based on Christina Boyle, "Pope Francis displays humility, picks up his own luggage at a hotel before inaugural afternoon Mass in the Sistine Chapel," <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/pope-francis-displays-humility-picks-luggage-hotel-article-1.1288258>, Thursday, March 14, 2013.

² <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/opinion-la/la-ol-pope-francis-common-touch-first-overseas-trip-20130722,0,2115788.story>

1. Background: Paul vindicates his apostleship

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he made a point on leadership that forms a good intro to this week's study. He told them to meditate on whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, and lovely and of good report. Then he adds, "***The things which you have learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do***, and the God of peace will be with you" [Phil. 4: 8-9]. If we link those two verses together, then we can draw the conclusion that the things that were true, noble, just, pure, lovely and of a good report that the people were to meditate on were actually what they had learnt from Paul's words and conduct. He led them by example.

A leader is that person whose responsibility it is to steer on course or to a higher level of excellence a system or organisation or ministry placed under his/her care. Leaders have privileges and entitlements conferred on them by their positions but they also have choices. ***When a leader chooses to give up certain entitlements and privileges for altruistic reasons, then s(he) is said to be humble. S(he) is leading by example, not by exempting self from the chores that his/her subordinates are expected to do or bear for him/her.***

No matter how people in leadership positions behave while in office, the influence they have on their subordinates is best measured after their tenure. For example, you can no longer reward or punish subordinates when you leave. Therefore, the only hold you have over them is your impact on their lives which is determined, to a large extent, by your conduct while in office. For example, can you visit that office after your retirement/departure and still command the respect and admiration of your former colleagues and subordinates? Many of us cannot-unfortunately! Leading by example while still in office is a panacea for such post-service regrets. That is why this week's study is a crucial one for most of us who are still in service.

Paul's pattern of self-denial suggests that a leader does not have to "cash" every entitlement if s(he) wants to command the respect of others or the loyalty of subordinates. The following (from this week's Bible verses) are worth noting:

a) *Paul was entitled to certain privileges as an apostle*

Paul said to the Corinthians, "Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" [1 Cor. 9: 1-2]. Without an iota of doubt, he was an apostle, having been called by Christ Himself even though he was not one of the twelve. When Jesus sent Ananias to restore Paul's sight (after he had been blinded by the light of Christ's appearance to him on the road to Damascus), the Lord said to him, "Go, for ***he is a vessel of Mine, to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel***" [Acts 9: 1-15]. The signs of an apostle, "signs and wonders and

mighty deeds,” were accomplished among believers wherever Paul went [2 Cor. 12: 11-13]. During his missionary journeys, “God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and evil spirits went out of them” [Acts 19: 11-12].

As an apostle, Paul was free to conduct himself like the other apostles like Peter (Cephas), James and John. For example:

- With the exception of Paul, the other apostles and well-known disciples, including the brothers of Jesus, were all married to believing wives [v. 5]; and
- As workers in the vineyard, *Paul was entitled to material compensation for his spiritual work* “for those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” [v. 14].

b) *But Paul chose self-denial!*

As the apostle to the Gentiles, kings and the Jews, Paul knew that his words and deeds would be under close scrutiny. So, he decided to hide in the open, so to speak! He chose, among other things:

- Not to get married but *to remain celibate* [1 Cor. 7: 7]. That freed him from marital and family pressures to embark on three gruesome missionary journeys that enabled Christianity to spread to modern Europe [Acts Chaps13 -20]. He suffered for Christ beyond normal- he received thirty-nine stripes from the Jews five times; he was beaten with rods thrice; he was stoned to death once (but revived) and shipwrecked three times, among many other hardships and persecutions [2 Cor. 11: 24-26].
- *To fend for himself*, “That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel” [1 Cor. 9: 18]. He made tents for his livelihood [Acts 18: 1-3]. In his farewell address to the church elders in Ephesus, Paul said, “You yourselves know that these hands of mine have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. *I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus ... ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’*” [Acts 20: 34-35]. That was why he overrated the generosity of the Philippians when he said, “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; *though you lacked opportunity*” [Phil. 4: 10].

In sum, Paul gave up his entitlements voluntarily in order to lend credibility to his words that he could do ALL THINGS through Christ who strengthened him

[**Phil. 4: 13**]. It vindicated and validated the authenticity of his message and ministry. That was why he could advise young ministers like Timothy that the love of money is a root of all evils [**1 Tim. 6:10**]. He could have been talking to the present generation of church workers who preach prosperity more than salvation! So, *if you can practise what you preach, you do not need to speak much!* What lessons can we take away from Paul's experience?

2. Lessons for your leadership practices

Leadership is not for everybody, but some of us get born into it (such as royalty or birth order) while some of us seize it by force (such as rebels) or by intrigue. No matter how you got there, you must leave one day. If you are worried about the legacy that you want to leave behind, you must invest in one while still there.

Leading by example is one sure way to leave behind a solid record of appreciation. Therefore, the following lessons from Paul's experience can serve you well:

a) *Examine your motives for leading*

On the day that Jesus called Saul (Paul) to become an apostle, that was not Paul's plan or purpose or motive. He was going to Damascus as a persecutor of Christians, not to become one of their prominent leaders. Nevertheless, his zeal even as a Pharisee was to uphold the word of God as taught in the Law of Moses, "but when it pleased God to reveal His Son" in Paul that he "might preach Him among the Gentiles," he received it through the revelation of Jesus Christ Himself [**Gal. 1: 11-17**]. Therefore, the first thing that you need to be sure of is your motive for leading.

Some people want to lead just to use that opportunity to feather their own nests, usually through corrupt practices. Some people covet leadership for power over their rivals, known or unknown. Nevertheless, there are some people who seek leadership simply to better the lot of others. What is your motive? Are you a politician because you want to steal public funds for self and family? Are you a pastor to run a family business in a disguised way? Are you suffering from an inferiority complex which you think you can cure by riding it rough over your perceived Joneses?

On the other hand, ***you can use your privileged position to glorify God by being humble, that is, giving up privileges and performing chores that will make life easier and better for your colleagues, subordinates and others.*** Always remember that exaltation comes from God who can elevate or dethrone any leader. Therefore, you cannot deal boastfully or speak with a stiff neck from your leadership platform. God the Judge is watching you [**Ps. 75: 6-7**].

b) *Know your strengths and weaknesses*

It is not everyone who drives a vehicle that is called a driver! Even a professional driver may not be the one to choose his itinerary. In like manner, that you are occupying a leadership position does not mean that you know everything better than others, especially your subordinates. Therefore, it is in your own interest to know your limitations and to be able and willing to learn from your subordinates.

Take the case of Zedekiah who was the head of four hundred prophets during the reign of King Ahab of Israel. The king was planning to go to war with Syria over a piece of territory, Ramoth Gilead. Zedekiah and his men prophesied that he should attack and that God would give him victory. But his visiting brother king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, advised Ahab to seek another opinion from “a prophet of the LORD.” Ahab brought in a young prophet called Micaiah who had the reputation of speaking the blunt truth. He told the king that he would die in battle and that the 400 prophets were giving him a false message that God had allowed an evil spirit to pass to wicked Ahab. But what did Zedekiah do? He went near and struck Micaiah on his cheek, saying, “Which way did the spirit from the LORD go from me to speak to you?” [1 Kgs 22: 1-24]. In the end, it was young Micaiah’s prophecy that came to pass. Ahab died as a result of wounds from the battle at Ramoth Gilead [vv. 29-38].

Be humble enough to learn from others so that you can adapt to rapidly changing circumstances around you. Otherwise, you could soon become a dinosaur instead of leaving behind a dynasty!

c) *Learn to lead a team that will enable you to succeed*

Usually, when we talk about the past, we tend to look at it in terms of successful leaders. You will hear of what Winston Churchill did to win the Second World War for the Allied Forces or how John Kennedy began the mission to land Americans on the moon. Yet, Isaac Newton’s lesser-known second law states, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”³ Look at Paul’s gratitude list in the evening of his life? It consists of maids and servants, fellow disciples, scribes and tradesmen, a physician and so many others, without whom his ministry might have been more challenging [Rom. 16: 1-15,21-24]. Look at the lowly women who served Jesus and “provided for Him from their substance” [Lk 8: 2-3].

Learn to thank those colleagues and subordinates who have laboured for your victories and successes and shared your sorrows and failures.

³ http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton

Appreciate and respect your critics because they may have helped you to strengthen your wings, to stay on course and remain human. Weep with them when they weep; rejoice with them when they rejoice [**Rom. 12: 15**]. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law [**Lk 4: 38-39**] and paid his temple tax [**Matt. 17: 24-27**]. He slept where His disciples did, sometimes with rocks (presumably) for pillow because "the Son of Man ha[d] nowhere to lay His head" [**Lk 9: 58**].

d) *Your ultimate reward is from God!*

Paul wrote, "What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel" [**1 Cor. 9: 18**]. There was nothing wrong for him to accept material compensation for spiritual work. But, by refusing, he demonstrated to those whom he ministered to that he was doing God's work. It gave credibility to his work. ***Paul's eye was on the crown of salvation, lest when he had preached to others, he himself should become disqualified*** [v. 27]. Therefore, you must always realize that your ultimate reward will come from God- both material and eternal [**Lk 18: 29-30**].

The time you are still in service or about to leave may not be the time to know the impact that you have made on those that you have led. Sometimes, it could come as retrospective appreciation, when people begin to compare eras and come to appreciate that you were a rare breed. So, ***leave judgment to the world but make sure you have led by good examples. That is Paul's message to us in this week's study.***

3. Conclusion: Christ led as a servant!

Christ is the Word of God through whom all things were made. When He came to earth as Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, He took a lowly human form, as a bond servant, born in a manger. He gave up all privileges of pomp and pageantry, befitting Him as King and "being found in appearance as a man, ***He humbled Himself*** and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Now, His Father has highly exalted Him, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth" [**Phil. 2: 5-11**].

What was the key to Christ's success as a leader? As a human being, He was tempted "in all points as we are, yet without sin." We have a High Priest who can sympathise with our weaknesses [**Heb. 4: 14-16**]. While on earth, He went everywhere "doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" [**Acts 10: 38**]. He worked because He saw His Father working [**Jn 5: 17**]. ***He led His disciples by example, as their Servant***, not their Lord. Go and do likewise!