

# The Weak Gospel Warrior

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     with different people about issues of leadership. For example, Saturday a week ago we began our Growing Leaders course and so the whole of the morning was devoted to thinking about issues to do with leadership.

We began by putting pictures of 25 famous leaders, world leaders in history, up on the board for people to identify and to think about which ones do they admire the most.

We had people like Hitler and Einstein, Bill Gates and John Howard and didn't have Kevin Rudd I don't think because I actually did the collection before last year's election and so on.

Hillary Clinton's there, that's not a prophecy. But what leaders do we admire? And I've had conversations in the church context as well. So earlier in the week at an Archdeacon's meeting an Archdeacon is what I am in the Anglican Church looking after about, for me, 25 churches thinking about the leadership within those churches where it needs to be encouraged or helped or whatever. And there are some churches that are struggling significantly and those issues of leadership come up in conversation.

As well as that I've we hear on the radio issues to do with leadership in federal government. We've seen significant leadership this week by the Prime Minister and some bipartisan leadership as well. Of course issues of leadership have come up with East Timor as we think about the legitimate democratically elected leadership but the threat of rebel leadership that nearly killed the President of East Timor.

[ 1 : 3 3 ]     We see the issues of leadership paraded before us in a fairly grouping primaries, especially for the Democrat Party in the United States as they seek to find their candidate for the presidential election later this year.

Will it be Clinton or will it be Obama? And that raises all sorts of issues of leadership as well. And then in informal conversations, church leadership meeting of the vestry on Tuesday night, often issues of leadership come up in different ways and so on.

What sort of leaders do we look up to? I say that partly as a pun because it's surprising how many famous leaders are actually tall people. Apparently the taller you are, not exceptionally high, but tallish people stand a better chance of leadership than short people. Now there are lots of exceptions to that, of course. It's not an overall rule, otherwise we wouldn't have had the previous Prime Minister for 11 years, I suspect.

And probably not the Queen of England either. But often leaders are tall, especially in our slightly more visual age with TV and magazines and all that sort of stuff.

The height of people is often apparently significant. What sort of things about a leader do we admire? Their eloquence, their ability to speak in persuasive ways, a la Martin Luther King, for example.

[ 2 : 5 4 ]     Their charismatic personalities that somehow can whip up a group or even a frenzy. We've seen good and bad examples of that in the last century around the world. Is it their courage, their glamour, their dress sense, how white their teeth are, how well their hair is cut or permed or whatever? I mean, they might sound trivial things, but actually they're highly significant things for people seeking leadership, not least in a political sphere.

Well, leadership is also a key issue for the church, of course, and not just our church, but churches in general. And if you go into a Christian bookshop, it's very much like a secular bookshop at this level, there are dozens of books about leadership.

Far too many to read. 21 keys to this aspect of leadership, 13.3 keys to that issue of leadership, and so on. Many, many books on aspects of leadership. As well as that, there are seminars, there are all sorts of leadership gurus that come out from Christian circles that I get invitations by email or the mail or something to go to, leadership conferences, courses, seminars, etc. I must say that much of it seems to echo the leadership in the secular world, the sorts of values of leadership in the secular world. Churches often are looking for people who have got a sense of glamour and charisma, have got an eloquence, are bold, and all those sorts of things. Often it's the same sort of criteria that a big organisation is looking for that spills over into the church.

So the sorts of people often who end up looking for people to be leaders of churches are people who've got some experience of that in big organisations as well. And the same sorts of criteria come up. One of my roles as an archdeacon is to be on the committee that looks for new ministers when a church is vacant.

And quite often those sorts of things come up. What sort of person are you looking for in a leader? Someone who can organise well, someone who can sort of build a great team, or someone who's got some charisma or eloquence or whatever?

[ 5 : 06 ] Well, it's not new, let me say. It seems that the first century church in Corinth, in ancient Greece, was in danger of going down a similar sort of track. This second letter of Paul to the Corinthians is, at the surface, largely a self defence by Paul for his leadership, authority and ministry. He's defending it against attack.

To the Corinthian church as a whole, who it seems are being tempted to drift away from Paul's teaching and leadership by some who've come into the church and are trying to put down or dismiss or sideline Paul's apostolic authority and leadership.

And in particular, it's these last chapters where this issue comes very much to the top of the page. It's been a clear undercurrent in earlier chapters. Now it comes very much to the fore at the end of this letter.

But it's actually a bigger issue than that. It's not really just about Paul's self defence for his ministry. But rather, underneath is a bigger issue.

It's an issue of fighting for the gospel. Because Paul knows that the issues that are driving the attack on leadership are actually attacks in the end on the very gospel of the Christian faith.

[ 6 : 24 ] That's why Paul goes in, I think, with all metaphorical guns blazing. Don't want to suddenly give you the picture of what we saw in the animation. The animation was fantastic. Thanks, Alex. And it really does help us to come to grips with what's going on in this chapter tonight.

Paul goes into this issue really with all guns blazing, not because he's fussed overly about his own reputation, but rather because he knows that underneath the leadership attack is really attack on the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified.

The issue of leadership for Christian churches and for Christians actually hinges on the issues of the gospel of Jesus. And we'll see that tonight.

Paul is being despised by many. These so-called super apostles, as he calls them later on, it seems have come into Corinth and they say, well, our authority is greater than Paul's.

Paul isn't performing signs and wonders. He's not very eloquent. He's not a great speaker or public orator, for example. He's not particularly strong. He's always been thrown in prison and beaten. We don't think actually he's that commanding a figure.

- [ 7 : 33 ] We think you should leave his authority and hear what we're saying and follow our leadership and our authority. That's the sort of situation that the Corinthians are finding themselves in.
- In person, they say, Paul's actually rather timid and weak. From a distance, he might write a fairly bold letter. And the previous letter that he wrote, which is not one Corinthians, but one that's lost in between, is regarded as a sort of severe letter.
- They say, from a distance, he might write those words. But when you've met him face to face, he's really quite timid. There's nothing commanding about him at all. So push him to one side.
- Follow our leadership. We're here now and we'll provide the leadership that is needed. He's not your hero. Well, Paul, in chapter 10, begins this section to the end of the letter, in effect, with a strong and direct counterattack.
- I myself, Paul, laying before them personal and authoritative claim, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.
- [ 8 : 43 ] I, who am humble when face to face with you, but bold towards you when I'm away. I'm sure he's quoting them there with an element of sarcasm. That's what they say about me, isn't it?
- That I'm humble or timid might be a better translation, when I'm face to face with you. I'm only bold toward you when I'm away. That's what they're saying. Well, I, that Paul, I appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.
- When he quotes them, he's being a bit sarcastic, as we see, because his appeal is by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.
- The Christ who said, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, for I am gentle and humble in heart.
- The same words, actually, that are used here. See what Paul's doing? He's appealing to the Christian leader, Christ. And he's appealing to the aspect of his character, his gentleness and meekness, that Paul is actually being ridiculed for in his own character.
- [ 9 : 55 ] You say, I'm just gentle and timid and meek. Well, I appeal to you by the gentleness and meekness of Christ. You see who he's aligning himself with.
- You see what he's implying then. You might think that gentleness and meekness is not something to look up to in a leader. Well, if that's the way you think, you're turning away from Christ, who is gentle and meek.
- They think that Paul is weak. Paul says he is meek. And meekness is not weakness. Indeed, I think more and more that meekness is huge strength.
- What Paul is implying here is that Christian leadership is to be modeled on Jesus Christ, on the character, virtues, values of Christ. Christ. He's saying, in effect, that Christian virtues are far different from worldly values.
- The world despises, even today, humility and meekness. I remember I used to live in Brunswick and as I walked to college each day, there was a little place that had a great big poster.
- [ 11 : 06 ] It was there for a couple of years, at least, gathering dust and squash flies. Self-assertiveness classes. That's what our world's on about. Assert yourself. Claim your rights.
- That's what our world thinks are values to aspire to. But Christian leadership aspires to the virtues of meekness and gentleness following the model of Jesus Christ.

Well, Paul goes on to say, I'm prepared to be bold. Being meek and gentle doesn't mean that I'm a coward. It doesn't mean that I'm timid. I ask that when I am present, I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards.

Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards. Literally, we live in the flesh, but we do not wage war according to the flesh or by the flesh.

Paul in the letter to the Philippians talks about living in the world, but being not of the world. And that's in effect what he's saying here. Yes, I live in the flesh, but as a Christian leader, I don't wage war by the flesh, by human standards, by worldly standards in effect.

[ 12 : 24 ] What he's actually implying there is that the leadership that's come into Corinth that is misleading the Corinthians, all that is about is worldly standards. And he says, pay attention to the standard that we're to follow, the gentleness and meekness of Christ.

Paul introduces the military theme in verse 3. We wage war. And that theme carries over in the verses that follow again.

And we're used to war because we see it all the time on our TV screens and the newspapers and magazines. There's always war going on. There's hardly been any days in this last hundred years where there's not been a significant war going on somewhere in the world.

And if not one, many. We see it all the time with civil wars and now the war on terror. So we see war in Afghanistan and Iraq and Pakistan and the Sudan. We see it in the Congo and East Timor.

We've seen it all over the world in recent years. And what it is, is basically the rush for power. Might is right. Who's got the most tanks, the biggest army, the greatest nuclear weapons and all that sort of boastfulness in might.

[ 13 : 38 ] Christian war is different. Something sadly that crusaders in the medieval times failed to quite understand. Paul says in verse 4, The weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds.

What war is he talking about? It's actually the war on minds. The strongholds that are destroyed are arguments at the end of verse 4.

They have divine power to destroy strongholds. What are these strongholds? We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God.

And we take every thought captive to obey Christ. In the Christian context or the church context, the human weapons mightn't be tanks and swords, but they'd be things like eloquence, charisma, signs and wonders.

That Paul is despised for not displaying significantly. Human powers of persuasion or something. But Paul says his warfare has divine power.

[ 14 : 56 ] Not human power. Not what our world often thinks is powerful, even in the elements of persuasion of people. But rather divine power to destroy strongholds.

That is arguments. That is every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God. What is this divine power? Well, Paul's made it very clear to the Corinthians already what this is.

Back in chapter 4, he said in these words, In their case, In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For we do not proclaim ourselves. We proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. And there he's not speaking really any differently from what he said in what we call 1 Corinthians, which is at least two letters before this one, where he said at some length in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, for example, Jews demand signs, Greeks desire wisdom, worldly power, we might say, but we proclaim Christ crucified.

A stumbling block to Jews, foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[ 16 : 24 ] Later on in chapter 4, he also went on to talk about himself as being just merely a jar of clay, but inside it there was treasure. What Paul is saying here is very important for us as we think about our own lives, the leadership that we aspire to or admire, and what we follow as well.

The strongholds are arguments, are thinking. And so often people set themselves up like a fortress to hide behind with their human reason.

Notice how verse 5 called it proud obstacles, because it's human pride that is the bottom, the ground rock, the bedrock of sin.

And it's human pride that sets up these obstacles to cut off and block and to protect from the knowledge of God. That's what Paul's saying there. I've met many people like this.

I remember a friend of mine at university. He was a lovely guy. He knew the gospel. We and I and others had shared it with him on different occasions. Occasionally he would come to church.

[ 17 : 35 ] I remember him one day saying to me, you know, I'm not a Christian. I actually believe that Jesus rose from the dead. That's astonishing, really, because there are people who claim to be Christians who don't believe that. I believe all what the Bible says, the key things about Jesus dying for sin, rising from the dead.

He said, I'm not a Christian because I want to be in control of my life. That's the proud obstacle, in effect. I want to rule my life. Now, he was a really nice guy.

He was a humble fellow in some respects, serving all sorts of different people. But actually, it was human pride that set up an obstacle. I remember when I was in England and involved in the church and the staff when I was doing my PhD in England, a youth minister asked if I'd meet with one of the guys.

He was about 16 or 17, I think, because he'd run out of, in a sense, apologetic conversations with him over months and months about the gospel. I remember talking with him for a couple of hours.

And I realized in the end that there was some blockage that was actually not intellectual, but moral. Turned out later, as I discovered, that it was what people these days would call gay pride.

[ 18 : 44 ] He really wanted to live a homosexual life. And that's what was stopping him from becoming a Christian. It's a proud obstacle. And human beings who are not believers, because of their pride in their sin, set up obstacles.

You've probably seen pictures of medieval castles and fortresses. I was in the Middle East before Christmas on holidays in the country called Oman and went out into the desert to see one of these ancient fortresses.

And it had, like, the drawbridge thing. It didn't have a particular moat, but it had a wall around the castle, lookout points all the way around. We could climb up and walk along, looking at all these lookouts.

And as well as that, as you walked in, there was a gap in the wall where the door was. And they had these things that would come down with pointy ends in metal so that as they saw the enemy approaching, they would try and spear them coming down.

As you would walk up the steps into the centre of the fortress, there were, unbeknownst to me until I got to the top, holes down onto the pathways where apparently they'd pour boiling water or oil as a measure of trying to protect themselves against the invaders as they came in.

[ 19 : 57 ] And there were several places where doors or things would come crashing down as a way of trying to kill, maim, stop all the people coming in. Now, if you can envisage a castle or a fortress, now place it as yourself.

You're the fortress. And if you're not a believer in the Lord Jesus, then you, in effect, are putting out these barriers, veneers of protection against the gospel that are grounded in your pride.

I want to rule my life. I'm guarding myself against any invasion on my life, in particular, invasions from God. So what warfare is going to be used for this?

You see, Paul's answer here is not clever tricks. It's not somebody who's got such a toffee voice, a toffee as in sweet, caramel voice is the word I use.

I remember when I was at a meeting in Canberra last year, General Synod, somebody said to me, wow, he's got caramel voice. We'd believe anything he said. Now, there are people who look for preachers like that, who've got the voice that's so sweet, so persuasive, so skillful, that they're just beguiled by whatever they say.

[ 21 : 10 ] Paul's not looking for tricks. That's not how you get in to the pride that set itself up as a fortress around a human heart or mind. No. No. What is it?

It's the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ crucified. And to us, that looks just like empty words. But that's powerful words.

It's God's power for salvation. It's the scriptures that are powerful to make us wise for salvation in Christ, as Paul says in 2 Timothy. It is the message of Jesus Christ, the gospel of Christ, the scriptures about Christ, that is powerful.

We think of them as just words on a page, and we see lots of them in our life. But these are powerful words. They're not powerful because the speaker might have a nice resonating voice that will somehow dull people into sort of accepting whatever they say.

They're not powerful words because a preacher is going to fuck the pulpit until we all say, yes, yes, yes, I'm going to follow them. They're powerful words actually independently of the preacher in the end.

[ 22 : 21 ] They're powerful words because it's God who makes them powerful. They've got divine power. Divine power to destroy strongholds, that is, to destroy arguments, to destroy human worldviews and human reasoning that are set up because of pride that wants to guard my life because I want to live life my way.

And the only thing that will penetrate successfully into those fortresses, those strongholds and arguments and reasonings and worldviews is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's what Paul's referring to in verse 4 and 5. The weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.

Notice, captive not to believe only, but to obey. Because the gospel of Jesus Christ is not about just changing our minds, but about making us submit to and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That is, it will lead to our actions changing, not simply an intellectual statement like, my friend, yes, I believe Jesus rose from the dead, but rather a life that submits to the lordship of Jesus Christ, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4.

[ 23 : 42 ] There he said, we proclaim Jesus as Lord. That is, that people through their thoughts being made captive will obey Christ. I wonder whether you've ever thought that your thoughts are captives.

See, if you picture the fortress and the invading army that comes in and takes out the captives from the fortress, that's what Paul's got in mind. That somehow the gospel will penetrate and take our thoughts and change them so that we obey Christ.

It's not simply about winning arguments, you see. It's not about a TV debate. Who's got the cleverest arguments? Is it Paul or is it an atheist here? But rather that the power of the gospel doesn't score points to win a debate, but actually captivates the thoughts under Christ's lordship and leads people to obey the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the object of Christian ministry and Christian leadership, is that the power of the gospel will work in people's lives. And you see, in the end, it's nothing to do with the appearance of the leader, the height of the leader.

It's nothing to do with whether they've got a letter of recommendation, an issue that was raised against Paul in chapter 3. It's nothing to do with popularity or charisma. Nothing to do with their eloquence at all. It's nothing to do with their vivacity, whether they're an extrovert or something like that.

[ 25 : 05 ] But it's everything to do with the gospel of Christ crucified. And the argument of 2 Corinthians, like the argument of the whole of the Bible, is that actually then Christian leaders are weak.

But it's in the human weakness that God's power is made manifest. An argument of 1 Corinthians, an argument of 2 Corinthians. It's an argument of the story of David and Goliath. It's an argument of the story of Jesus hanging on a cross.

Where we see human weakness so often is actually God's power at work. And the trouble is when we invert that and we look for humans who are powerful and think they'll be great Christian leaders because of their charisma, their power, their influence, we're actually heading in the wrong direction.

It's a gospel issue actually because it's denying the power of the gospel and thinking that power resides in the person, their charisma, their influence, their popularity, their style, their haircut and all that sort of ridiculous stuff.

It is the gospel of Jesus that's powerful and that's what matters. Has the power of the gospel of Jesus stormed the stronghold of your heart and mind?

[ 26 : 15 ] Are your thoughts captive to Christ? Do you think Christianly? Do you interact with the values of our world and think that's not Christian?

Because our world is trying to bombard us and penetrate us with its values, its consumerism, its hedonism, its egotism, its self-satisfaction, its self-fulfillment and all the ideologies of our world.

Are your thoughts captive to Christ? So that you think Christianly about your life, about your choices, about your decisions, about your future, your ambitions, your aims, your desires, your pleasures, your relationships, your study, your work, your goals.

Because that's what the gospel's about. It's about changing us from the inside so that in everything we obey Christ. Or is perhaps Christianity merely a social veneer?

Something that's respectable, pleasant enough, okay for a Sunday night, but not for your whole life? Is it simply a pious facade?

[ 27 : 34 ] Or is the gospel changing your minds and your hearts? What then do you look for in a Christian leader? One of my discussions recently with some of the leaders in the Anglican Church was reflecting on different people and saying, well, they're very dull.

But dullness actually is, well, you know, okay, they might be right, they might be dull, but actually as I reflected on this sermon, I thought we never actually thought, do they faithfully preach the gospel or not?

To my shame, I thought, I should have thought of that more as a criteria in those discussions. What matters most is whether they're faithful to the gospel or not.

Well, the application that Paul draws out of it for his situation is don't judge by false criteria. He says in verse 6, we are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

That is, when you Corinthians have sorted out where you stand, we will then apply a punishment to those who are disobeying by seeking to mislead you.

[ 28 : 45 ] And he says to them, look what is before your eyes. That is, look at what's obvious. If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we.

Don't be misled by those who seem to say we don't belong to Christ. We, Paul, are leaders. Even if I boast a little too much of our authority, maybe referring back to a previous letter, which the Lord gave, referring back to his conversion on the road to Damascus, he gave it for building you up, not for tearing you down.

And I'll not be ashamed of it. I'm not backing away from my authority as an apostle, is what he's saying. And I'm not backing away from my model of leadership, which I'm appealing to you by the gentleness and meekness of Christ.

I do not want to seem as though I'm trying to frighten you with my letters. For they say, and here again he quotes these false teachers in Corinth, his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak.

In fact, there's a writing from the second century AD that said that Paul had crooked legs was short and bald and probably had a speech impediment. Well, we don't know whether that's accurate or not.

[ 29 : 55 ] It doesn't matter, actually. They say here his speech is contemptible. That is, he's not a good speaker, a good orator. You know, the Greeks loved good oratory and philosophers would wander around speaking all their philosophies.

But behind so much of it was their skills of rhetoric and whether they spoke well. One of the most famous of Greek orators was Demosthenes.

But in his early days, he was fairly unprepossessing. And so he would put pebbles in his mouth and he'd walk uphill with pebbles in his mouth while he spoke to train himself to be a good speaker with good use of the voice and to develop his lungs.

And he became very famous as a speaker but what he spoke was probably rubbish. Paul says, that's not the model that I'm following. Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present.

Paul's about to go back to Corinth and he's saying to them, if they think that when I'm there, I'm timid, let them be told otherwise. I've warned you about where you're going wrong and this is an issue I will deal with when I come if you're not changed.

[ 31 : 11 ] And then he says, with quite a deal of sarcasm and satire really, we wouldn't dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves.

What he's saying is, they think they're the ants' pants. Well, I wouldn't dare compare myself with them. But in a very sarcastic and satirical way, he's actually, of course, putting them down.

When they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense or wisdom. You see, they were boasting, basically.



Oh, I've got better speech than they do. Or I'm bolder or whatever it is. Sadly, it's something that happens all the time for Christians and Christian leaders. Ministers are always comparing themselves or being compared by others to other ministers.

It's a fairly dangerous game, sadly. We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us to reach out even as far as you.

[ 32 : 11 ] Paul, I think, there is putting them down because they've come from probably Jerusalem. They're certainly Jewish-type speakers, as we saw earlier in the letter. And they're infiltrating Paul's area of ministry.

Back in the early days of the apostles, Paul and Peter basically divided the world between them, sort of. It's mentioned in Galatians 2. Paul went one way, Peter another. And other places, Paul and Barnabas go separate ways.

That is, they're not in competition with each other. And so Corinth has been Paul's area of ministry. And he's actually putting them down by meddling and interfering in a church that he has planted.

That's why he says, we don't boast beyond limits. Paul will boast of the Corinthians because it's within his limits of where he's planted churches by the gospel. That is, we don't boast beyond limits.

That is, in the labors of others. Oh, sorry, I skipped to verse 14. We were not overstepping our limits when we reached you, when he first came to them with the good news of Christ.

[ 33 : 10 ] He's the one who planted the church there. We do not boast beyond limits. That is, in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged.

Paul, I think that perhaps means that he'll be able to go deeper with them. But primarily, what he means is that as your faith increases and you become more mature in your faith as a church, and in fact, he's egging them on to maturity and saying this, then as he says in the next verse, so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you.

That is, Paul wants to go as far in the world as he can preaching the gospel. But he's not going to leave a fledgling church that's just going to die or be misled by others. He wants them to stand up in maturity so that Paul can safely, in effect, move on to areas where the gospel has not yet gone.

Indeed, to Spain, as he says to the Romans, is where he sees his next sort of missionary venture. For him, it's almost the ends of the earth in those early days.

And he doesn't want to boast of work already done in someone else's sphere of action. The end of verse 16. Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord, for it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.

[ 34 : 28 ] Here are false teachers in Corinth commending themselves, saying that the way I've got it. Here are our signs, our wonders, our eloquence, our charisma, our good looks, or whatever it is.

Paul says, boast in the Lord. For the approval that matters is not human approval. It's not like we saw on the animation where the flocks will go in because of the new gimmick of one church and then they'll flock out to the other church because of the new gimmick there.

Sadly, that often happens. But rather, Paul says, we don't seek human approval, but we seek the approval of the Lord.

It is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends. Self-commendation and boastfulness and even the drive of personal popularity is sadly insidious in church life and the world is actually full of it.

The church is sadly often full of it as well. But Paul's arguing here that Christian virtues are different from worldly values. And what the world might flock to is probably not what the Lord will commend.

[ 35 : 44 ] For the model of Jesus is gentleness and meekness, which is far from the values of our world. This is a hard lesson.

Don't think this is obvious and don't think it's easy. It's hard. Because we human beings covet fame. We covet glory and popularity and status.

We covet human honour. And there's a mixed motive and a temptation with all of us. We don't like to be unpopular. We like to have pews filled and so on.

And I know I'm vulnerable to the issue of pleasing people or seeking to please people rather than God sometimes. Christian leadership often provides good avenues for kudos.

And it's often why people want to be in Christian leadership. But Paul reminds us here of something that actually addresses one of our key fallen motives of envy, covetousness, pride and so on.

[ 36 : 47 ] It is the Lord's commendation that we are to seek and it's that alone that matters. Though it's a complicated argument in a way, these are crucial principles for churches and church leaders.

every thought of ours is to be governed by the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That's a challenge to all of us.

Everything we think about, every action that we do, every motive, every desire is to be brought under, made captive to Christ. Christ. And if there are areas of your heart and mind that are not, let this passage in its power storm that stronghold.

This passage is teaching us secondly that the approval that we must covet is God's commendation, not the world's. The world's applause dies out very quickly.

The applause of one day is forgotten the next when the next hero comes along. But the commendation of the Lord on the final day endures forever.

[ 38 : 07 ] And thirdly, this passage directs our attention, whether or not we're leaders, that the leaders that we look up to and admire or the leadership that we aspire to must be gospel leadership.

Not leadership that's influenced by the values of our world, but leadership that demonstrates the virtues of Christ and the gospel. That is the leadership that will endure during affliction as Paul's did.

That is leadership that will not seek public applause. It is meek, lowly, and gentle leadership like that of Christ. And we know what happened to him by the world.

Anything to do? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.