

Xplore Leadership

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 23rd of January 2005. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled Explore Leadership and is based on 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 1 to 21.

Let's pray. Father, as we come to your word tonight, we pray that you open our hearts and our ears and our minds, that we may understand more fully how we are to be good Christian leaders.

Father, we pray that your spirit will be working in our lives, that this will indeed be a church of good leaders, Christian leaders, but also, Father, that we will send our good Christian leaders.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen. Most people dream of being a great leader at some point in their lives.

[1 : 03] It may be that you dreamed of being a great leader of a particular sporting team. For me, it was being hockey, although I wasn't a particularly good leader, a captain of my hockey team.

Perhaps it might be for AFL. Perhaps it might be that you had great aspirations like me of being the school captain, but was never really picked. I'm not quite sure why, but, you know, perhaps you have great aspirations of being a school captain.

Perhaps you want to be a business organisation, the senior manager of a firm. Perhaps you'd like to be the head of a political party, although not the Labour Party at the moment.

This is really a bit of a problem there. Perhaps you have a great aim of being the leader of the Australian Cross Stitch Guild. Perhaps not. I don't know.

But all of us, I guess, have at some point a dream of being a great leader. So, what do you think of when you think of being a great leader? Well, most people, I think, when they think of being a great leader, when they're daydreaming about leadership, no matter what the context is, I think there's a few images that come to mind.

[2 : 09] I think that the average Australian, when they think of leadership being one of the great leaders of whatever it happens to be, they think of being the best, or at least being better than most.

They think that they will succeed where others have failed. They think that they will be the rock where others have stumbled. That they'll create things where others perform things.

They are the people who win the cheers and applause and great accolations from the crowds, particularly if they've done it the hard way. I think in most eyes of Australia that leadership means fame, money, power and influence.

Freedom from responsibilities of the humdrum of existence of ordinary mortals. It means strength. It means being put on a pedestal and being admired to have the respect of others.

This is the picture, I think, that we have of leadership, that the average Australian has when they think of a leader, of being a leader of whatever it happens to be. School, sport, whatever it happens to be.

[3 : 16] Only a few, I think, think through the responsibilities and pressures and temptations that leadership might bring. And I think almost never do they focus on the accountability, the service and the suffering that Christian leadership brings.

Well, we've been working through the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, thinking about this element of Christian leadership.

Of course, these four chapters aren't primarily written as a guide to Christian leadership, but there are great things written here for those who are wanting to be Christian leaders. Chapters 1 to 4 are primarily concerned about this faction, faction, factionalism that has happened in this church at Corinth.

You see, there's these different groups going around in the church, tearing the church apart, some following Paul, some following Apollos, some following the teaching of Peter.

They're all separating, all these different factions. There is jealousy and one-upmanship. But much of this has arisen from these habits of following and associating themselves with the different leaders.

[4 : 31] Well, Paul found it necessary in these chapters to actually get the right concept of what leadership is about, to help them understand what genuine Christian leadership is about.

And so, he wants to try and get them away from the models that are influencing them. You see, this Corinthian church, they're looking at all the leaders of their society and they're allowing those models to influence themselves.

There was these great philosophers back then, the sophists, the teachers, whom they prized form above content.

They had prestige above humility, stoicism above passion, philosophical wisdom above frank confession of ignorance and limitations of human knowledge, rhetoric above truth, money above people, reputation above integrity.

That was the sophist teachers back then, these teachers of the world, and they brought this influence to bear. We do that often in Christian churches, don't we?

[5 : 40] We want to take the models and the teaching of the way that leadership should happen out there in society and try and apply it all to the church here. Well, Paul has to get it right, make sure they understand what it means to confess Christ crucified, also to try and get rid of this terrible tenancy of the church to put up on pedestal their Christian leaders, where they put them up and for others they tear them down, simply because of personal preferences.

Well, in today's passage, chapter 4, this is the final in this series. And again, Paul wants to nail this on the head. He wants to put this issue away. He wants to deal with it finally, this issue of Christian leadership.

And so he wants to look at some of the very important principles of the nature of Christian leadership. Now, as I said before, this isn't the whole textbook in these four chapters on Christian leadership, but there are some very important principles we need to listen to and adhere to.

Well, in verse 1, I've lost my page here, there it is. In verse 1, Paul begins by telling them two things that they ought to think about Christian leaders, two elements that ought to be in every Christian leader.

Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Two elements. The first is Christian leaders are to be servants of Christ.

[7 : 13] Now, when you're thinking of titles for leadership, you don't think of a servant. You think of things like senior manager, all-powerful president, ruler, emperor, wise teacher, independent guru.

They're the type of things you think of when you're thinking of leadership. You don't think of servant, of subordinates, of underlings, titles of lowness. But Christian leaders are to be servants of Christ.

They are to be people fundamental to their ministry. It is to be a humble, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. They are to have a devotion to Him expressed in daily prayer, love expressed in daily obedience.

Christian leaders are to be servants of Christ. That's the first thing, the first element. The second element that Paul points out there in verse 1 is, they are to be stewards of God's mysteries, of God's revelation.

At the heart of a leader's great commission, received from their master, lies this one particular task, this assignment, to be good stewards of the gospel.

[8 : 27] You see, in chapter 2, we see that God's mystery has been revealed in Jesus Christ. This great mystery is the great news of Jesus Christ, the message of Him and Him crucified.

Leaders are to be good stewards of this gospel. It is a special, precious gift. We are to communicate it and proclaim it clearly and boldly and with truth and love.

We are to uphold it and defend it. We are to be good stewards. As we look around our church, there are many who are not good stewards of God's Word, of the gospel that has been proclaimed.

But Christian leaders, they are to be stewards of God's mysteries. So, they're the two elements that Paul sees as very important in Christian leadership. They are to be servants of Christ and they are to be stewards of God's mysteries.

In verse 2, he says that in these things, they must prove themselves to be trustworthy and faithful. They must prove themselves that they can uphold these two things.

[9 : 40] But who are they to prove themselves? Who is it that they are to show that they are trustworthy in these things? Who is the one who is going to keep them accountable? Who do they look to to make sure that they're doing the right thing?

Verses 3 and 4 make it very clear that it's not the Corinthian church. It's not any human court and it's not even your own appraisal of yourself and your service.

No, you are accountable to the Lord. Look there in verses 3 and 4. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.

I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. There is no room for trying to win respect from your peers and parishioners.

There is no room to try and please yourself, to try and get your own self-esteem built up as your ultimate goal. There is only one opinion that matters. There is only one person who's well done that counts on that last day and that is Jesus.

[10 : 55] We are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wants to make this very clear in these first two verses. This is what a Christian leader looks like and they are accountable to the Lord Jesus.

But then he goes on in verse 5 to actually bring out an application for the church. Remember this is the church that is holding up all these different leaders where all these factions are happening.

Paul has talked about these leaders that he might deal with this issue of all these factions happening. Therefore he says any Christian leader who has this attitude, should have this attitude, then it's important for the church to understand this as well, that they should avoid judging their leaders.

Look there in verse 5. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Then each one will receive the commendation from God. Paul makes it very clear that there is no room for the church to stand up and start judging people by human standards, of putting some people up on pedestals and for others tearing them down.

[12 : 12] Paul makes it very clear that they are not to do that. This is not the way that the church ought to behave. If it's that the leaders are accountable to God, then they're not the ones who are the ultimate arbitrators, the one who is going to bring about judgment on these leaders.

It is God who will bring about that. This is what Paul is trying to correct. Well, in verses 6 and 7, Paul takes this abstract principle of the church not judging their leaders and he takes it and he wants to put it into a form that they can understand that is happening in the Corinthian church.

And so he says in verses 6 and 7 that he applies this to both Apollos and himself for their benefit so that they may learn through us the meaning of the saying nothing beyond what is written so that none of you will be puffed up in favour of one against another.

The saying was going around in the church. It's not a Bible verse that we've got quoted there, nothing beyond what is written. It was probably a phrase going around there. Don't do anything other than what is written down.

And Paul is saying, look, so that you might learn this, so that you might understand the right things, don't go about doing these things. I've applied it to Apollos and myself.

[13 : 33] Therefore, don't start being puffed up and trying to choose other people. Don't be the judges. Leave that to God. Of course, when we think of judgment, bringing judgment and discipline against some leaders, there is a time which is right to bring discipline where we ought to hold our leaders accountable for wrong leadership.

But that's not the issue here. Paul's not trying to deal with the issue of the leaders are at fault here. It's the Corinthian church who are going around trying to judge these leaders, trying to put them up on pedestals, trying to cause factions, the thinking of leadership in terms of human terms.

And so Paul was trying to deal with this. He's trying to undercut human pride and boasting. And so to bring it home, we see there in verse 7, Paul gives a couple of questions.

Questions to point out that even the gifts that these different leaders have come from God himself. For who sees anything different in you?

Or as we see there down below, who makes you different? Well, the answer's got to be God. He's the one who makes us all different and gives us all different gifts. What do you have that you did not receive?

[14 : 50] What did you have before God gave it to you? Nothing. God is the one who's given it to you. And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? You see, Paul's making it very clear.

Look, it's a gift that these leaders have been given anyhow. It's not some type of human thing that we can build up in ourselves. There is no room for pride and for human pride there at all and for boasting.

Well, that's the first point. Paul wants to make it very clear about Christian leaders. Christian leaders are to be servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

They will be accountable before God. That's the first point. We move now to verses 8 through to 13 where Paul talks about how leaders aren't going to win the riches of this world but in fact are actually the scum of this world.

Paul starts in verse 8 with language that is steeped in biting irony. Here we see these Corinthians who are smug and self-satisfied they are comfortable and they are proud.

[16:01] They think they have got it all. Already you have all you want. Already you have become rich. Quite apart from us you have become kings.

You see these Corinthian church thought that they already had heaven on earth. They thought that God's kingdom had broken in and that they were experiencing it here and now.

This was it. They had paradise. They had all the gifts that they needed. They had all the riches they needed. They thought that this was where it was at. Well the Bible tells us that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead.

That he was the first in the kingdom. And from Colossians 1 we can see that we can by faith now even be a part of that kingdom. But the Bible makes it clear also they were waiting for the day when Christ will return.

When the kingdom will be fully consummated. Where we'll see it in all its glory. Where there'll be a new heaven and a new earth. But it's not now.

[17:07] The Corinthians were acting as though they were there now. But Paul makes it very clear no. Paul indeed wishes that he in fact was there.

That God's kingdom would break in fully. At that moment I wish that you had become kings so that we might be kings with you. But in verse 9 he starts contrasting these Corinthians who think they've got it all.

That the kingdom has come. And he starts talking about the way that he has been living. And he uses a very uses an image that of the Roman world.

An image of a Roman procession. triumphal procession. Look there in verse 9. For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all.

As those sentenced to death because we have become a spectacle to the world. To angels and to mortals. you have to imagine being back there. Back when one of the Roman legions, the great leader walks in after a great battle.

[18:18] He's just conquered a nation and he's got all the spoils with him and all his army. And so he's marching out in front of his army as he comes back home in this triumphal procession.

You'd have the leader first, then you'd have all the senior leaders and then you'd have all the troops and then behind the troops then would come those you'd caught. So it might be the king who would come next and after the king you might have his leaders and then after that you might have their troops that you've caught.

And then right at the end you might have the lonely troops. But right at the very, very end beating the dust of the whole procession would be the slaves, the servants.

Right at the very end they are the lowly of the lions. Knowing as they march into the city that they're going to be fodder for the gladiators, that they're going to be food for the lions in the arena knowing that they are there for certain death.

Paul says we are last of all. You may be kings but us apostles we last of all. We've got the sentence of death.

[19 : 29] We've become a spectacle to the world, to the angels and mortals. In the spiritual world we're the lowly of the lions. Paul in verse 10 then goes on to, with more biting irony, bring out this contrast.

We are fools for the sake of Christ but you are wise in Christ. We're so foolish but you're so wise. Of course the truth is the exact opposite isn't it?

They're the ones who are the fools and they don't even see it. They're not the ones who are wise. They are the foolish ones. Paul continues with this irony where he talks about we are weak but you are strong.

You are held in honour and we are in disrepute. For the present hour we are hungry and thirsty. We are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless and we grow weary from our work of our own hands.

When reviled we bless. When persecuted we endure. When slander, slandered we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things to this very day.

[20 : 50] Paul realises in the worldly terms they are the lowly of the low. Oh what a difference that is compared to the triumphalistic picture that the Corinthian church wanted of themselves.

That they were kings, that they had it all. Paul says no Christian leaders that's not what it is in worldly terms we are the scum of the earth.

We are the rubbish of the world, the dregs. You may not have experienced that. Certainly we see it very clearly in our world today in many places where there are churches where Christians are persecuted, treated like rubbish for their faith.

Well there are three points I guess that we should make from just this little section verses 8 through 13. We are people who follow a crucified Messiah. We are people who are to be like Christ and take up our cross daily.

We are to die to our self interests, to the things of this world and daily follow Christ. The second thing is that as leaders in the church, most will suffer.

[22 : 13] It's not a glorious job being leaders, Christian leaders. The Christian leaders aren't the ones who are the generals who sit behind the battle lines, away from the battle front.

No, they're up there. They're the assault troops, front line, leading by example. that's the picture Paul wants of the Christian leaders, in there, in the battle.

Thirdly, it's a message that is for all Christians. You see, it's not just the leaders, but this is a vision, I guess, of what it is to live a life of, a Christian life, a life of discipleship.

Well, there's the first two points. We see that Christian leaders are to be people who are servants of Christ, stewards of God's mysteries, and accountable to God alone.

Secondly, we see there that Christian leaders are the scums of the earth, according to worldly terms. And finally, we see here that Christian leaders are to be those who encourage the believers, to warn the believers with that of the affection of the Father.

[23 : 29] Have a look there in verses 14 through to 17. I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers.

Indeed, in Christ Jesus, I have become your father through the gospel. We see there, Paul's using hyperbole. Although you might have ten thousand guardians or people looking after you, you only have one father.

Paul's not being blasphemous here. He's not taking the role of Christ, but he's saying that his affection for them is that of a father. I have three beautiful daughters.

I love my daughters. They're great. And I try to encourage them, to build them up, to help them and encourage them and look after them and care for them as a father should.

But I know just as much as it is good to be building up and praising my daughters, I know that I need at times to bring discipline, to bring warning.

[24 : 41] Paul says there in verses 16 and 17, he's trying to build them up, trying to encourage them. So he says, I appeal to you then, be imitators of me.

For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child and the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Paul's trying to encourage them, build them up. He's sending his beloved servant Timothy to go to them, to encourage them. But we see there in 18 through to the end also, Paul brings a very stern warning that they ought to amend their lives and repent.

But some of you thinking that I am not coming to you have become arrogant. But I will come to you soon if the Lord wills. And I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.

For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

[25 : 48] Paul comes and warns that he will bring discipline. Some think that he's not going to turn up. He lets them know I will turn up and I will give you a choice.

Will I bring stick or will I have to come in gentleness? It's up to them. See the way that leaves it open. How will they live their lives? How will they mend their lives?

Well there we see the final picture of leadership. That of fatherly love for those in their care. A picture of encouraging the believers.

Of warning the believers. Making sure that they live lives that bring honour and glory to God. Well this time next week I'll be on the road in a car with my three daughters driving somewhere between here and Canberra.

This is my last Sunday night here. I'm going to take a position up in Canberra as a children's family worker in a church there. I wonder what type of leader I will be there.

[26 : 54] What type of leadership will I have? What will be the nature of my Christian leadership? Lisa has started, this is her first week this week.

What type of leadership will she have here? Jonty has taken a year off to do some leadership here in children's and youth work as well. Paul's continuing to be the pastor.

What type of leadership will he exercise here in this church? Many of you will take up new ministries as well. We're seeing Steve and Rachel I think leaving.

This is their final week and they're going off somewhere hopefully to take up some Christian leadership there as well. Danny and Allie are starting a new church this year. Helen and Andrew I think this is their final night as well.

What type of leadership will they have when they leave? Others will stay as leaders here. Others won't have any leadership role here at all.

[27 : 56] How ought we be praying for our leaders? Praying for us here. We ought to be praying that our Christian leaders are servants of Christ.

We ought to be praying that they are good stewards of God's mysteries. We ought to be praying that they realise they are counted before God and God alone and not try to win the faint praise of men.

They ought to be people who recognise the cost of that leadership. They ought to be people who care for those in their care with a fatherly care, warning and encouraging.

May we be people who pray these things. We're out and need it. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.