

GOD GIVES LEADERS (1 Cor 12.4-6,28)

[Chelmsford 2 June 2013]

1. LEADERS GET RESULTS

According to Amazon.com, since 1989 more than 20,000 books have been published with the word 'leadership' in their title. I have to admit that I have contributed to this glut.

- In 1990 I wrote a book entitled *Dynamic leadership. Rising above the chaos of the one-man band*. It sold quite well and went into a 2nd edition
- In 1995 I wrote a second book entitled *A Call to Excellence. An essential guide to practical leadership*. It didn't sell as well, because I discovered that most ministers aren't into excellence, they are into survival
- Then in 1997 the Baptist Union published *Radical Leaders: A guide for elders and deacons in Baptist churches*. That has done well, and went into a second revised edition.

But what do we mean by leadership?

According to a book I read last month, the test of leadership is whether it is a catalyst for action. To quote: "*Leadership is about motivating and mobilizing people to get 'something' done, be that extraordinary or otherwise*".

Leadership is not about appointing a man to a position.

As one leadership guru put it: '*Putting a man in charge and calling him a leader is like giving a man a Bible and calling him a preacher. Bestowing the title doesn't bestow the talent*'.

The fact is that leadership is about getting results.

Leadership is not about making good presentations, nor is it about being liked, it is about getting things done.

2. LEADERS ARE NEEDED IN OUR CHURCH

All this is highly relevant at this point in the life of our church.

For at this very moment we are looking for leaders.

Deacons

Next Sunday, for instance, we have a deacons' election.

To people who haven't grown up in a Baptist church, the word '*deacon*' is a strange term. What does it mean? Our English word '*deacon*' is derived from a Greek word and literally means '*servant*'. Within a Baptist church the service deacons have to offer is leadership. Hence my book called *Radical Leaders* – with its subtitle, *A guide for elders and deacons in Baptist churches*. Deacons, therefore, are the lay leaders of a Baptist church.

Deacons are not called to be representative of various sections in the church. Nor are they called to be grey committee men and women. They are called to be leaders. Those of you who are members of this church will have the privilege of electing up to six deacons. I mentioned their names in the notices: Andy Allan, Maudrian Burton, Ian Gruneberg, Chris James, Derek Latimer, and Amanda Wilson. If you have been a member of this church for a number of years you will know them – if you are new to our church hopefully you will know some of them. Their faces appear in *Team Talk*. But please don't vote for them according to their looks. Vote for them on the basis of their giftedness to lead.

Senior Minister

Then in the not too distant future the church will be looking for a new senior minister. Alas *Anno Domini* dictates that I will stand down from leading this church in March 2014. But what kind of senior minister will you be looking for? I suggest to you this morning that first and foremost you need not a preacher nor a pastor, but a leader. Yes, preaching is important, pastoring is important – and so too is worship, evangelism and social action. But uppermost comes leadership. The word '*minister*' is derived from a Latin root, and that too means '*servant*'. The key service a minister has to render is to lead.

According to one American commentator: "*A lack of leadership may be part of the reason that in a typical year, an average of at least eight Protestant congregations disappear every day... Churches need more leaders, not more members.*"

I believe that what is true in the USA, is true too of the UK. God's church needs leaders.

3. GOD GIVES LEADERS

This morning I want to look at the three passages where Paul lists some of the gifts God gives to his church. Significantly we discover that in all three passage Paul mentions leadership:

Romans 12

One list is found in Rom 12: .6-8: **"We are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have; if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to each, we should teach; if it is to encourage, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully"**

Notice three things:

1. Leadership is described as a “**gift**”. There is much discussion in books on leadership as to whether leaders are born or made. I believe it to be both. God gifts men and women as leaders – but leaders have a duty to hone their leadership skills.
2. Leadership, says Paul, entails “**authority**”. A church where nobody has authority is a church where anarchy reigns. Indeed, the word ‘anarchy’ simply means ‘no leadership’, ‘no authority’.
3. Leadership, says Paul, entails “**hard work**”. Thomas Edison, the man who invented the electric light once defined genius as “*1% inspiration, and 99% inspiration*”. The same is true of leadership. Leaders need to work hard if they are to be effective

Ephesians 4

A second list is found in Eph 4.12: There Paul writes: the Risen Christ “**appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers**”.

Again, notice three things:

1. Here, it is the Risen Christ who gives or “**appoints**” leaders. Leadership comes from above
2. Secondly, Paul lists four kinds of leaders, not five. The risen Christ has given to his church: “**apostles**”, “**prophets**”, “**evangelists**” and “**pastor-teachers**”. Probably apostles, prophets and evangelists were engaged in trans-local leadership – they were not limited to one church. Whereas by contrast ‘pastor-teachers’ were locally based leaders.
3. The term ‘**pastor**’ in the first place does not relate to pastoral care. Literally the term “pastor” meant “*shepherd*” – and in Paul’s day kings and emperors were called ‘shepherds’. It was another word for leadership – as Jesus himself once said, the good shepherd goes ahead – and the sheep follow!

1 Corinthians 12

A third list is found in 1 Cor 12.27-28: “**All of you are Christ’s body, and each one is a part of it. In the church God has put all in place: in the first place apostles, in the second place prophets, and in the third place teachers; then those who perform miracles, followed by those who are given the power to heal or to help others or to direct them or to speak in strange tongues**”.

Notice yet again three things

1. Whereas in Rom 12 is God the Father who gives gifts, and in Eph 4 it is the risen Christ, here we have to do with God the Spirit giving gifts. God is Trinitarian!
2. Paul is not saying that “apostles” are of first importance; “prophets” are next in the pecking order; then come, “teachers”; and after that everybody else with their gifts. Earlier in the chapter Paul has already made it clear that there is no place for one-upmanship in the church. Rather, what Paul is saying is that when it comes to

founding a church, then the key people needed are “apostles”, “prophets” and “teachers”. The apostles are the church-planters, who bring the Good News of Jesus; the “prophets” and the “teachers” are those who build up the church through their gifts of encouragement and exposition of Scripture. Then, once the church is up and running, other people with other gifts have a role to play, and not least leaders, who have “**the power to direct**”.

3. Paul uses a fascinating analogy for leadership. The GNB speaks of those who have “**the power to direct**”. The NRSV speaks of “**forms of leadership**”. But neither translation does justice to the underlying imagery. Literally, Paul speaks of the gift of “*helmsman-ship*” – the gift of steering the ship. This term was often used metaphorically in Greek literature of the art of government: the task of the statesman was to guide the ‘ship of state’. Here, of course, the ship in question is the church. The leader is the one who keeps his hand on the tiller, the one who ensure that the ship is kept on course.

[NB the English word ‘governor’ has a similar derivation – save that it derives from the Latin ‘gubernator’ – helmsman]

Let me elaborate on this image:-

4. LEADERS STEER THE SHIP

John Gunstone, a good Anglo-Catholic charismatic friend of mine once put it this way: *“The leader... is the man at the helm. The gathering (i.e. the church) is driven along by the wind of the Spirit, but unless the leader’s hand is firmly on the tiller, there is every danger that the ship’s course may be deflected by the cross-currents of human emotions and ambitions that move not very far below the surface of the sea over which she sails.*

Gunstone went on to argue that this gift is basic to every pastor’s ministry: *“the spiritual gift of the ordained ministry is seen to be that of ‘presidency’ (i.e. helmsmanship’). He is not the one who has every spiritual gift necessary for the congregation..... But what he has above all is the charisma of leadership which enables him to preside over a congregation in its worship, life and mission, in such a way that he enables individuals and groups in that congregation to minister with the gifts that God gives them”.*

Gunstone ended his exposition of this image by commenting that a ship with no one at the helm is a frightening place to be. How right he was. Just think of the Costa Concordia!

Unfortunately Paul does not develop this image of helmsmanship – for when he was writing to the church at Corinth the concept of leadership was not an issue – it was simply taken for granted that the church needed leaders. However, this morning I would like to take a degree of liberty with the text and suggest three further points:

1. Leadership is always plural.

The underlying Greek word does not refer so much to one leader as to the action of leadership.

We have here a noun in the plural – which one could translate as ‘*acts of leadership*’ From the verse itself we cannot say whether Paul is speaking of one person or a number of people. However, looking at the New Testament in general we can say that in the early church there was always a plurality of leadership. There was always more than one leader in the church.

This morning I thank God that I am not a solo leader – but rather I am part of a leadership team. Here I refer not just to my fellow ministers, but also to the deacons who together with the ministers are part of our church’s leadership team.

Yes, as ‘senior minister’ I may be the leader of leaders – but I am not alone in leading. And I am the better leader as a result. In the words of the proverb, ‘**iron sharpens iron**’. Neither the ministry team nor the leadership team are made up of me + a group of yes men and women. Together we seek to discern the will of God for our church. Together we seek to exercise leadership.

In the forthcoming deacons’ election it is important that we elect people who are willing to think, to dream, to take an active share in the decision-making processes of this church.

2. Leadership is always visionary

Leadership is not management – for although leaders need to be managers, managers are not necessarily leaders. Leadership provides direction, management is concerned about control.

Reflect for a moment on the image of the helmsman.

The helmsman is not just controlling the ship, the helmsman is steering the ship.

Without direction a ship can just go round and round – but with direction, the ship can go places.

What is true of a ship, is true of a church. Leaders must be able to give direction.

They must be men and women of vision.

I vividly remember John Wimber once saying that every Friday morning, he lay down by his swimming pool, with a can of coke in one hand, and a Bible in the other, dreaming dreams.

No wonder Wimber proved to be such an effective church leader!

Such vision – such direction – is particularly needed at this time when the centre of our city is in the process of being redeveloped. How, for instance, are we going to rise to the challenge of the 219 new dwellings which are due to be built around our church?

At the moment the leadership has a detailed development plan – it runs to many pages.

But this development plan is not written in stone.

For the world in which we are living is constantly changing.

In this changing world we constantly need to be re-writing our strategy. To go back to the picture of the boat: navigation is not a one-off exercise, but a constant exercise.

So when it comes to appointing new deacons, we need to be looking for men and women who can think strategically – men and women who are not rooted in the past, but rather are open to the new things God may be doing in the future.

3. Leadership is always tough

I was sent an article recently entitled '*The Secret Pain of Pastors*'.

It began with a quote from an American leadership guru, who said that the four hardest jobs in the USA were: the president of the US; a university president; a hospital CEO; and a pastor. The article then went on to list some of the problems pastors' face: criticism, rejection, betrayal, loneliness, weariness, frustration and disappointment. Wow!

And what is true of pastors, can also be true of deacons.

There have been times in our church when the deacons have been misunderstood and unfairly criticised. Serving as a deacon is not a doddle!

Let's go back to the image of helmsman. In a storm the helmsman often needs a good deal of strength to keep the ship on course. OK, that may not be true of a modern cruise-liner where the ship can be controlled with the touch of a finger. But in an old-fashioned sailing boat, you need a degree of strength and toughness.

So when it comes to appointing new deacons, we need to be looking for men and women with a certain degree of toughness – true, they need to be compassionate and tender-hearted, but they cannot afford to be wimps if they would lead the church!

And so I could go on – but time will not permit.

God gives leaders – may God provide our church with the leaders we need, so that we can be effective in 'going Christ's way and making disciples'!