

LEADERSHIP – AN HONOURABLE AMBITION

Dear Brethren,

Calvary greetings to you in the most wonderful name of our Lord and warrior – Jesus Christ, who has grouped us together as an integral part of His Regiment in this nation at this end-time.

To aspire to Leadership is an honorable ambition – I Timothy 3:1

Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not – Jeremiah 45:5

No one from the East or the west or from the Desert can exalt a man.

But it is God who judges: He brings one down; He exalts another – Psalm 75:6-7

Real leaders are in short supply. Constantly people and groups search for them. Throughout the Bible, God searches for leaders, too. "The Lord has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of His people" (I Samuel 13:14). "Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city" (Jeremiah 5:1). "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall" (Ezekiel 22:30).

The Bible shows us that when God does find a person who is ready to lead, to commit to full discipleship and take on responsibility for others, that person is used to the limit. Such leaders still have shortcomings and flaws, but despite that, they become spiritual leaders. Such were Moses, Gideon and David. And in the history of the church, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Adoniram Judson, William Carey, and many others.

To be a leader in the church has always required strength and faith beyond the merely human. Why is our need for leaders so great, and candidates for leadership so few? Every generation faces the stringent demands of spiritual leadership, and welcomes the few who come forward to serve.

If the world is to hear the church's voice today, leaders are needed who are authoritative, spiritual and sacrificial. Authoritative, because people desire leaders who know where they are going and are confident of getting there. Spiritual, because without a strong relationship to God, even the most attractive and competent person cannot lead people to God. Sacrificial, because this follows the model of Jesus, who gave Himself for the whole world and who calls us to follow in His steps.

Churches grow in every way when they are guided by strong, spiritual leaders with the touch of the supernatural radiating in their service. The church sinks into confusion and malaise without such leadership. Today those who preach with majesty and spiritual power are few and the booming voice of the church has become a pathetic whisper.

Many people regard leaders as naturally gifted with intellect, personal forcefulness and enthusiasm. Such qualities certainly enhance leadership potential, but they do not define the spiritual leader. True leaders must be willing to suffer for the sake of objectives great enough to demand their wholehearted obedience.

Spiritual leaders are not elected, appointed, or created by synods or churchly assemblies. God alone makes them. One does not become a spiritual leader by merely filling an office, taking course work

in the subject, or resolving in one's own will to do this task. A person must qualify to be a spiritual leader.

Often truly authoritative leadership falls on someone who years earlier sought to practice the discipline of seeking first the kingdom of God. Then, as that person matures, God confers a leadership role, and the Spirit of God goes to work through him. When God's searching eye finds a person qualified to lead, God anoints that person with the Holy Spirit and calls him or her to a special ministry (Acts 9:17; 22:21).

God wants to show such people how strong He really is (2 Chronicle 16:9).

But not all that aspire to leadership are willing to pay such a high personal price. Yet there is no compromise here: in the secret reaches of the heart this price is paid, before any public office or honor. Our Lord made clear to James and John that high position in the kingdom of God is reserved for those whose hearts – even the secret places where no one else probes – are qualified. God's sovereign searching of our hearts and then His call to leadership, are awesome to behold. And they make a person very humble. This is a clear indication of God appointed leader as oppose to self-seeking status in the church.

The word ambition comes from a Latin word meaning campaigning for promotion. "The phrase suggests a variety of elements: social visibility and approval, popularity, peer recognition, the exercise of authority over others. Ambitious people, in this sense, enjoy the power that comes with prestige and authority. Jesus had no time for such ego driven ambitions. The true spiritual leader will never "campaign for promotion."

To His "ambitious" disciples Jesus announced a new standard of greatness: "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-44).

Most Christians have reservations about aspiring to leadership. They are unsure about whether it is truly right for a person to want to be a leader. After all, is it not better for the position to seek out the person rather than the person to seek out the position? Has not ambition caused the downfall of several otherwise great leaders in the church, people who fell victim to "the last infirmity of noble mind"?

No doubt, Christians must resist a certain kind of ambition and rid it from their lives. But we must also acknowledge other ambitions as noble, worthy, and honorable. The first two verses at the beginning of this note provide a warning and an encouragement for sorting out the difference. When our ambition is to be effective in the service of God-to realize God's highest potential for our lives - we can keep both of these verses in mind and hold them in tension.

In truth, the Fellowship affirms the fact that all Christians are called to develop God-given talents, to make the most of their lives, to develop to the fullest their God-given powers and capacities. But Jesus taught that ambition that centres on the self is wrong, but ambition that centers on the glory of God and welfare or interest of the church is a mighty force for good.

Paul urges us to the work of leading the church, the most important work in the world. When our motives are right, this work pays eternal dividends. In Paul's day, only a deep love for Christ and genuine concern for the church could motivate people to lead. But in many cultures today where Christian leadership carries prestige and privilege, people aspire to leadership for reasons quite unworthy and self-seeking.

And so Jeremiah gave Baruch some very wise and simple counsel: "Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not" (Jeremiah 45:5). The prophet was not condemning all ambition as sinful, but he was pointing to selfish motivation that makes ambition wrong "great things for yourself." Desiring to be great is not a sin. It is motivation that determines ambition's character.

At the outset of any study of spiritual leadership, this master principle must be squarely faced: True greatness, true leadership, is found in respect for the constituted authority (persons or constitution) and giving yourself in service to others. True service is never without cost. Often it comes with a painful baptism of suffering. But the spiritual leader is focused on the service he and she can render to God and other people, not on the residuals and perks of high office or holy title. We must aim to put more into life than we take out.

"One of the outstanding ironies of history is the utter disregard of ranks and titles in the final judgments men pass on each other," said Samuel Brengle, the great Salvation Army revival preacher. "The final estimate of men shows that history cares not an iota for the rank or title a man has borne, or the office he has held, but only the quality of his deeds and the character of his mind and heart."

As we are entering into a New Year, this understanding could be very important to all our Pastors and Disciples. I pray that God may grant you patience to study, the ability to understand and the wisdom to apply all you have learnt in this note to improve your God-given assignment this year in His ministry.