

Last Sunday we noted Paul shift gears, from personal counsel to Timothy, to advice on addressing the Church at Ephesus of which he had pastoral oversight.

The biggest challenge facing society, is leadership. There has never been a time in human history, when a nation, society, community, even family, has not faced a crisis in leadership. This past week we witnessed several crises of leadership, at home and abroad.

The book of Proverbs offers us much practical wisdom, one of which is, "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*"<sup>1</sup> This verse in the King James version, is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied verses in the Bible. It is used by leaders to persuade a Church for the need of a vision statement: unless you know where you are going, how will you get there?

When leaders use this verse in this way, they are trying to position themselves as a visionary leader. Rick Warren, pastor and author of the "Purpose Driven" series says, "... your dreams determine your destiny. To accomplish anything you must first have a mission, a goal, a hope, a vision. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.'"

When this vision defining exercise is not centred on the word of God, and God's wisdom is not sought, it ends in a divided church. The principle is, when *vision* is not rooted, grounded in God's Word, society quickly spins into moral chaos.

"*Vision*" is not a leader's plan or desire for the church/organisation/ country they lead; in the Bible, "*vision*" refers to a special revelation which is God-breathed, has the spirit of God in it.

The church's challenge has always been its leadership. There is a two-way test to determine Godly leadership in a church:

**first**, does the leader (pastor, minister, deacons) bring a God-breathed revelation to the congregation he/she leads, God-centred focus to the community in which the church has its life? The real question is, does the

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 29:28 (KJV)

leader spend time with God and in God's Word, to be trusted to bring this faithfully to the congregation/community?

The *second* test is, will the congregation trust the pastor, minister, deacons when they bring God's vision to the people? The real question here is, does the congregation have evidence of the leader's spiritual life, to trust their message?

Having reminded Timothy of his spiritual heritage, the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to him, the message of Christ entrusted to him, and the strength and wisdom of God made available to him, Paul asks Timothy the second question, *Does your congregation have sufficient evidence of your spiritual life, to trust you and your message, by which you expose false teachers?*

So, what evidence of spiritual life should a congregation expect to see in their leaders?

Three qualities to look for in your leaders

1. a person who recognises he/she has been called by God and set apart as Holy. Their past, their wealth, their looks, none of these matter, what matters is, has the leader offered him/herself to be *"useful to the Master of the house, ready for every good work."* (v.20-21)
2. a person who makes a conscious effort not have anything to do with "foolish, ignorant controversies". The leader speaks **only** by the authority of the Word of God, in which he/she has spent time, **and** is **not** drawn into arguments outside the Word of God.
3. a person who is not quarrelsome, bickering and feuding, but is kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting with gentleness, those who oppose him. This is the true definition of *being meek*, one who has inner strength and power, but does not use it to assert him/herself.

The above is **not** a list of three qualities which make a perfect leader; no leader is perfect. A Godly leader is one who is constantly ever trying to be

Holy and pleasing to His Master who has called Him, who is trying to be rooted in the Word of God and not be drawn into unGodly arguments and controversies, and who is every trying not abuse authority by asserting him/herself, but with meekness of spirit, guides people into all Truth.

**Striving**, making every effort to make these three qualities part of their lives, is the key characteristic a congregation should expect to see in their leaders.

Paul knows well, all God's laws have a consequence, and opposing God's chosen, has repercussions. To those who oppose leader(s), in the sovereignty of God, He may grant them repentance which leads to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will (v. 25-26).

Paul offers a very interesting image of the spiritual battle between God and satan, that the devil satan, **captures us** to do his will, in the same way as a person is captured by an insurgent group (e.g. the so-called IS/ISIS) and made to do their will by speaking their message.

God, however, in His love and out of His mercy, grants those who oppose leaders whom He has called, a spirit of repentance leading to a knowledge of truth, that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil (v.25b-25).

Leadership is difficult at any time. There are always those who oppose leaders, there are always those who will derail and distract leaders with irrelevant issues, not central to their calling.

People in leadership positions in politics, in industry, in all organisations, have their own ways of handling distractors and those who would derail them.

Please don't look on these leaders and how they handle themselves and shy away from leadership in the Church!

People called by God to positions of leadership in a church, however, are protected by God Himself.

If you wish to take responsibility and participate in the life of this church, here are three assurances from God Himself:

**First**, God Himself will guard the lives of those who guard His Word (1:12, 14). There is no safer place to be, than doing God's will.

**Second**, God has given the Scriptures to us in trust, to pass along so that others will benefit from them (2:2). We have an obligation to do this (cf. 1 Cor. 9:16).

**Third**, we have a responsibility to be faithful to our trust. Paul offers three reasons why we should be faithful to God's trust in us:

1. The Christian faith is constantly being challenged, to change and adapt to so-called "*realities*"; there is need for people committed to faithfulness.
2. There is always need for Godly leaders in the Church, who are faithful to God's Word and responsible for God's people.
3. We live in the age of Christ's return.

Godly leadership has always been the need of the Church. Will you put yourself forward to be one?

It is not difficult, because the one who calls you, also gives you strength, wisdom and ability.

Will you respond?

**AMEN**