

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

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A Failure of Leadership

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Introduction

Leadership in the Church of today seems to be a confusing issue. I think this is largely due to the fact that the visible church has leadership models that do not correspond with biblical structure but rather draw upon worldly authority processes and procedures. Jesus, Himself, said it was not to be this way among us.

Calling them to Himself, Jesus *said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.
(Mark 10:42-44 NASB)

Leadership in the Church does not follow the worldly principles of authority. Nor does the leadership structure follow the pattern used by the world system. Therefore, the CEO style “pastor” with a board of directors is not the leadership structure of the Lord's Church in spite of what we see at the local corner denominational building.

How then do we identify the Lord's true leaders? If we can't identify them properly, how are we to evaluate their performance?

Biblical Leadership

Without arguing about the issue [*there are many articles on the website detailing this*], the Scriptures present two realms of leadership—that which functions locally and that which functions trans-locally or outside the local boundaries.

Locally, there are two categories of leaders—elders and deacons. The Elders give themselves to the word and prayer, teaching and leading by example. There is always a plurality of Elders; never a single person as leader. Initially, Elders are appointed by the Lord primarily through apostles. On the other hand, deacons are selected by the people from among themselves and confirmed by the Elders. Deacons are brought forth for specific tasks to serve the people.

Trans-locally, the leadership consists of what we call the five-fold ministry as listed in Ephesians 4:11. These are special ministries given by Jesus and are listed as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. [*The KJV use of the old English word “pastor” for shepherd has caused the word to take on a life of its own that is not biblical.*]

These special ministries have a specific function as given in Ephesians 4:12 for the “equipping of the saints” so that the saints can do the work of service or the ministry. This shows us that the primary purpose or function of leadership is to bring the saints to maturity, to equip them for their work of service. Of course, this brings up a secondary question of exactly what is the work of service? What are the saints being equipped to do?

Leadership Responsibility

First leadership has the responsibility to urge the saints on to maturity, to help them grow up. Work is not left for the children to do but for the grown ups. Hebrews 6:1 tells us “to press on to maturity” but gives us the prerequisite requirements before we can go on. The prerequisite involves laying a foundation of six principles in our life. These six “elementary teachings” are necessary before we can “press on to maturity”. A quick reading of Hebrews 6:1-3 shows that very few of these “elementary teachings” are taught in our churches. When they are taught, they are sometimes presented as “deep” teaching for the mature or they are presented as shallow, watered down doctrinal positions for their denominations.

Neglecting the six foundational teachings is a failure of leadership. One cannot go on to maturity without them. This is the primary reason that our churches have such shallow understanding of the word and the ways of the Lord.

Work of Service

With the failure of leadership to bring us into experiential understanding of the six foundational teachings, it becomes impossible for the saints to mature. Without maturity the saints can't be equipped for the work of service. So, what is the work of service? We have so diluted and expanded the concept of “ministry” that it becomes difficult to comprehend the biblical idea of service, which is very explicit.

First we need to remember that the Lord is bringing forth a “kingdom of priests” not a kingdom of believers. Priests have specific functions or works of service. Under the Old Covenant the Levitical and Aaronic priests served the Tabernacle and the Lord. There was a work of service in the Outer Court where the priests served the people. But, the service to the Lord was in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Only the priests could even look upon the holy things in these areas. Even those who moved and carried the tent and the furnishings could only take up the holy things after they had been wrapped and covered.

you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5 NASB)

Now, under the New Covenant, we are priests after the Order of Melchizedek and we serve a spiritual tabernacle made up of living stones and offer up spiritual sacrifices to the Lord as part of our function as priests. Only the functional priests have the spiritual eyes to see the “holy things” of the spiritual house.

The believers have to mature and be equipped by leadership in order to enter into their works of service. They are to be equipped to perform the duties of priests after the order of Melchizedek. One cannot become a functional priest until one “comes of age”; that is, “puts away childish things”.

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. (1 Corinthians 13:11 NASB)

A functional priest has come into maturity, put away childish things, and thinks and reasons with the mind of the Lord. He is now capable of doing the works of service.

The lack of power and relevance in our churches is due to the lack of biblical leadership and where there is some level of true biblical leadership, it has failed us by not understanding the job function to which the leadership was called. As a result, we have a kingdom of believers but not a kingdom of priests. The failure of leadership has caused the saints to NOT be equipped for the work of service.

[This teaching letter has been written for two groups of people: 1) those who desire to be true leaders, and 2) those who desire to be equipped for their work of service. I realize that this article only paints a broad picture and many of you who have eyes to see and ears to hear may have questions about details. Feel free to email me with any questions or comments that you might have.---Art Nelson]

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