

The Character of a Leader (2)

Duncan McLea

1 Tim 3:14-4:16

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- These are my rough preaching notes shared with you for the purpose of helping those who were not at the service to get the gist of the sermon, and for those who were to have a reminder of what was said. They are not corrected and polished for printable publication.
- If not done so already an audio recording of the sermon in MP3 format, will be posted on the webpage shortly.
- Making these resources available in this way is a new venture. If you do make use of any of them I would value your feed back and comment.

Introduction

This is the sixth sermon in this series looking at Paul's first letter to his young protégé Timothy. In this pastoral letter we get a window of understanding into a matter that is of central importance to us at this time in our life as a church – namely discipleship.

Last Sunday in chapter three we looked at the character of a leader as Paul instructs Timothy about what he should look for in those who appoints as overseers and deacons – effectively those who will be exercising leadership in the churches in Ephesus.

In chapter four, which we look at tonight, he continues looking at the character of a leader, and in particular I want to pick up on what he says more personally to Timothy about the sort of leader he needs to be.

But first there are some important things he says at the end of chapter three which we did not look at last week about the church.

Would you look at 1 Tim 3:14ff

14 Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that,

15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

He says three important things about the church.

First it is the household of God.

Paul has already referred to the households of those called to be overseers and deacons. He speaks about the church in the same manner using the same word (*oikos*).

Just as you can get dysfunctional families, so you can get dysfunctional churches where all sorts of power plays and manipulations and abuse are allowed to go unchecked. Paul's concern is that the churches in Ephesus under Timothy's oversight should be like good well functioning harmonious households / families. Now we know that even in the best families there are tensions and good days and bad days. They are dynamic. There are births and deaths, comings and goings, illness and holidays, growth and change.

But how you handle that is that is important. How we give space to try and learn new things. How we care for one another even when we disagree – all that is part of being a family. We can do it badly or we can do it well.

Paul wants people in the church to know how to behave towards one another. It is not a free for all – do as you like.

Why? Because ...

Second it is the church of the living God.

On a number of occasions in the Old Testament Yahweh is named as the living God, in deliberate contrast to idols that have no life in them at all.

The question is posed in Deut 5:26

For what mortal has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived?

This is a living God who **speaks**.

When Joshua lead the people into the Promised Land this word of promise is given in Joshua 3:10

10 This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites.

This is a living God who **acts**.

The Palmist cries out in Psalm 42:2

*2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?*

This is a living God who **meets our deepest needs**.

And where does this living God live? Where do we meet this living God?

In the church, Timothy. People in Ephesus will be encountering the living God who speaks, acts and meets their deepest needs, in the household of God ... What Paul refers to here as ...

the church of the living God.

That is why it is so important to choose the overseers and leaders who realise what is at stake in the way they lead and serve.

Is this about people being part of a well ordered and managed programme of religious activity?

No, it is about people encountering the living God.

That is what is at stake – that is why the bar is set as high as it is.

Third it (the church) is the pillar and foundation of truth.

The architectural imagery used speaks of truth as a foundation that is solid and can bear the weight of what is built upon it, and of pillars or columns that will lift truth up high so that everyone can see it.

Jesus is the truth. He is our truth.

Our task as the people of God – the church – the community of faith – is to build on the truth that is in Jesus and in him alone, and to hold Jesus up high so that all will be drawn to him.

This is expressed in the praise poem that follows.

Just briefly it points to Jesus as the foundation and high point of our faith.

There are six sentences each being with a verb (aorist passive).

They can be put in three couplets.

- *Appeared in the body – Vindicated by the spirit:*

Jesus is human and divine.

- *Seen by angels – Preached among the nations:*

The gospel of Jesus extends to all, Jew and Greek, men and angels, principalities and powers, ...

- *Believed on in the world – Taken up in glory*

The response to the gospel is that heaven and earth received and acclaim him Jesus, Lord of all.

Now if this is the message of the church:

Jesus is the truth is our foundation because he is human and divine –

He is God with us in the here and now...

He is not only our hope meeting our deepest needs – he is the hope of the world...

This message is for all time and for everyone.

When we grasp how powerful this message is and what a significant role the church has to play – it is no surprise that it will come under attack from the enemy.

And as we move into chapter 4 Paul refers to what seems to have been a word of prophetic warning about **three things** that come against good leaders in the church.

He says ...(1 Tim 4:1-2)

1 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

He speaks first about the role of the **demons**

Demons are simply agents of the enemy whom he describes as “*deceiving spirits*”.

In John 8:44 Jesus describes the Devil as the father of lies.

In Revelation 12:9 he is termed the deceiver of the whole world.

There is a spiritual battle going on the enemy is out to deceive us and he will target leaders because if leaders fall so do others.

Second there is human compliance with the devils plans

The Devil can't influence us unless we give him entrance – a toe in – a foothold.

In Ephesians 4:27 Paul says ...

and do not give the devil a foothold.

Here in addressing Timothy he speaks of teachings that come through hypocritical liars. Those who pretend to be one thing but are in fact another - who wear masks. Who willingly are party to deception which is the devils tactic. Those who play his game.

Third those who turn a deaf ear to their consciences

He speaks about a “consciencess seared with a hot iron”. The word means “cauterised” – or anaesthetised. It no longer has any feeling. It is numb.

That is what happens if we ignore the God given warnings he gives us. Our consciences get numb and no longer protect us.

The dangers of leaders who turn a deaf ear to conscience; who have no scruples about being hypocritical; are that the devil will get his toe in and disrupt the church.

This is what Timothy was up against in Ephesus. So as we move into chapter four I want to look at what Paul says specifically to Timothy about his leadership.

There is much here but I just want to draw out three things which I have found helpful and I trust will be helpful for you as you reflect on your life and the places where you are called to exercise leadership.

(1) Live thankfully

False teachers were promoting an unhealthy aestheticism that saw sex and food as inherently evil and so they advocated that people should not marry and that they should abstain from certain types of food.

In response to this Paul says in effect ...

How can anyone despise marriage, let alone forbid it,
when God instituted it?

How can anyone command abstention from certain foods,
when God created them to be received with thanksgiving?

What God had made and given, we are to receive with thanksgiving acknowledging him as Creator and Giver and so using what he gives in a manner that expresses that acknowledgement and thanksgiving.

So marriage is not seen as ours to redefine and use according to our rules. Marriage is God's and we receive it from him with thanks using it as he intended.

God made food. He made us to enjoy food. We express our thanks for the food we receive not only by saying grace before each meal but by eating in a way that honours God the giver and sees our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and treats them as such.

G K Chesterton wrote this poem.

You say grace before meals.

All right.

But I say grace before the play and the opera,

*And grace before the concert and pantomime,
 And grace before I open a book,
 And grace before sketching, painting,
 Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;
 And grace before I dip the pen in ink.*

Paul speaks about receiving with thanks and *consecrating (verse 5) with the word of God and prayer.*

The point is that we don't just receive something with thanks. That is good and polite. We go a step further. We receive with thanks and then speak over it the words of God.

What scriptures come to mind as read a book. As you play sport. As you get in a car and begin a journey. As you watch a film.

Take a scripture and recite it ...

All things are yours and all things belong to you (1 Cor 3:21)

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. (Phil 4:8)

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body. (1 Cor 6:19 & 20)

Jesus said, life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. (Matt 6:25)

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (1 Cor 6:13)

The LORD will keep you from all harm-- he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. (Psa 121:7 & 8)

So, Take a scripture and recite it and the consecrate what you are about to do to the Lord.

Living that way protects us from the snare of the enemy who would suggest that we deserve this, we own it, we can use it as we like, ... and all his other lies.

So live thankfully.

(2) Lead yourself

Verse 6

If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.

You know that safety talk you get every time you fly...

Ensure that your own oxygen mask is in place before you attend to other passengers.

Why? Because if you don't you will most likely pass out and be no help to them or yourself.

Paul says to Timothy, serve to others what you have fed on yourself.

People don't want theory and formulas. They want to know that the stuff you teach works for you.

Verse 7 makes the same point

Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

In 1 Samuel 30 we get a fascinating little insight into the life of King David as he faced one of his toughest leadership challenges.

At this point he is a young leader learning to lead his troops into battle.

Though David is a relative novice God is pouring his favour on him and so most of battles are going his way. Then on one seemingly normal day, the pattern changes. After returning home from fighting on one front, David and his men discover that the enemy soldiers have come around their flanks and

attacked and destroyed their campsite, dragging off their women and children and burning all their belongings.

This would define a bad day for any leader, but it is not over yet. David's soldiers are tired, angry and worried sick about their wives and children. They are angry with God. Finally some of them spread word that they have had it with David's leadership – this is all his fault, and they want to stone him to death.

Immediately David is facing a leadership crisis. He has to decide where to direct his leadership energies.

Who needs it the most?

His soldiers? The officers? The rebel faction? The answer?

None of the above.

In this critical moment David realises that he needs to lead himself before he leads anyone else. So he finds a solitary place and he groups internally with the Lord.

I have been a leader in the church for near on 25 years next month. In that time I have tried to train and equip leaders in different ways.

I have got to say that this is the most important thing I have learned about training leaders. Train yourself Duncan. Lead yourself. If you lead yourself well you will naturally lead others and equip them to be leaders.

I have learned this the hard way. By thinking that I can neglect myself and teach others something that I am not doing.

That will not grow the church or my family or anything else I put my hand to.

The leader's most important task is to lead himself / herself first.

First fit your own oxygen mask before you help your fellow passengers.

(3) Keep growing

Verse 8

⁸For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰That is why we labour and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, and especially of those who believe.

Paul uses the metaphor of an athlete in training. He says in effect train yourself to be godly. It takes discipline and application like an athlete training to develop muscles, stamina and fitness.

What you are training for though is not just for a fit healthy physical body which is for this present life and we know will fade away. He urges upon Timothy spiritual exercise that will produce godliness that will be of lasting and eternal value.

Work at it Timothy. Watch those spiritual muscles grow. Build up stamina for the long haul.

The word “godliness” or “godly” comes up frequently in the pastoral letters and it means in essence “a life centred on God”.

Titus 2:12

¹¹For the grace of God ... teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

Now the important thing is to grow in godliness.

He goes on in verse 15 to say...

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.

It is growth and progress that is important.

Down the ages many have written and taught about spiritual exercises, those things that help us grow in godliness.

GROUP EXERCISE

Turn to the person sitting next to you and ask them ...

“What spiritual exercise has helped you most to grow in godliness?”

Get feed back -

These are all helpful and important.

There is fourth point to note:

It matters to others how well you do

Would you note the importance of this for Timothy not only for himself but for others also.

Verse 16

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

There are implications for others about us applying ourselves to spiritual disciplines.

Unlike physical exercise which has benefit to us and helps us to be healthy and well. Spiritual exercise has benefit for others, those who look to us for a lead, as well as ourselves.

So three things that leaders need to give attention to in their lives ...

Live thankfully

Lead yourself

Keep growing

It matters to others