

Xenos Summer Institute – 2011

Essential Elements of Christian Leadership

Introduction

The Pastoral Epistles are a rich quarry of key elements of Christian leadership. Paul, a master leader, is reminding key leaders of what they need to do in order to lead effectively. 2 Tim. 2 seems to be an intentionally compressed list of six of these key elements.

These elements are not exhaustive.

But they are essential.

Apply 2:7 to this entire chapter.

Be continually strengthened by the grace that is in Christ (2:1)

“Be strengthened” is present tense (ongoing), imperative mood (a choice we must make), and passive voice (something we receive from outside ourselves). We must *continually choose to receive* the strengthening grace of Christ for our ministries!

What is this grace that is in Christ? All of the multi-faceted provisions freely given to us in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3-14; Rom. 8; Jn. 14-16).¹

This is probably first in order because it is foundational. Christian leadership is so difficult that only continual strengthening from Jesus is adequate.

How can we do this? Primarily by meditating on scripture (2 Tim. 3:14-17; Acts 20:32; Ps. 1:2,3; Isa. 50:4).

Develop other leaders (2:2)

The specific command here is for Timothy to do what Paul did with him: to entrust the content of the gospel to other faithful Christians who can teach it adequately to others. The development of solid leaders is the first functional element Paul addresses.

¹ “Therefore” (NIV: “then”) may refer back to the provisions of grace for ministry Paul reminded Timothy of in 1:5-18— his past spiritual mentors, his spiritual gift, the power of the Holy Spirit, his ministry calling, eternal life, God’s protection, and his present spiritual friends.

Why does Paul give this element priority?

- The many other responsibilities (see below) and inevitable emergencies and interruptions can easily crowd out this responsibility.
- This is urgent because quality leadership is essential, and we do not know how long we will be in this role.
- This is an exercise of faith that God will grow his church.

Selection is critical in developing leaders! Pray for and look for “faithful men”—people who show consistent passion for and loyalty to Jesus.

Embrace the rigors of Christian leadership (2:3-13)

Paul devotes the most verbiage to this element—maybe because Timothy was (like most of us) so inclined to shrink from these rigors. Leaders must not merely passively tolerate hardships when we can’t avoid them; we must choose to suffer them, to embrace them as a major and ongoing part of our leadership.

What are these rigors? 2:4-6 focuses on the rigors of the work itself.

- Like a soldier, we may stay focused on pleasing the Lord—and not allow our affections to be seduced from this (Mk. 4:19; 1 Cor. 7:29-35).
- Like an athlete, we must compete according to the rules—not cheating in our actual ministries, and not cutting corners on our own training.
- Like a farmer (especially in unmechanized agriculture), we must work very hard—day in and day out, in season and out of season. While our hard work cannot guarantee a harvest, our laziness can prevent a harvest!

So great are the rigors/hardships of Christian leadership that they require a special reminder of the reasons why they are worth it. This is what Paul emphasizes in 2:8-13.

- Life out of death is the law of redemption (2:8,9; Jn. 12:24-26).
- The salvation of souls is at stake (2:10).
- Eternal life and Christ’s reward will more than compensate for the hardships we endure in ministry (2:11,12).

Keep your teaching focused on biblical priorities (2:14-18)

Paul contrasts two different kinds of teaching emphasis through the use of two different terms used for road-builders. One “cuts a straight path” (*orthotomeo*) so that those who hear their teaching can travel to the destination. The other “swerves” or deviates (*astocheo*) so that those who hear their teaching do not reach the destination.

The destination is salvation through faith in Christ, and maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28). The teaching emphasis that leads people to this destination is what Paul calls “sound” (hygienic) doctrine. This sound doctrine has two key emphases: the message of God’s grace and the lifestyle of sincere love for one another and all people.²

By contrast, Paul warns not only against heresy (2:17,18), but also against doctrinal tangents and theological speculations (2:14,16)³—spiritual junk-foods that counterfeit real joy and promote spiritual selfishness and pride.

“Handling accurately the word of truth” therefore involves *both* regularly nourishing your people in the gospel and urging them to a lifestyle of love, *and* appropriate criticism and refutation of heresy and doctrinal tangents.

Pursue godly character in your own life (2:19-23)

Paul contrasts two different kinds of vessels in a mansion—ones that bring honor to the owner, and ones that bring no honor or dishonor to him. The point is the vital importance of godly character in Christian leadership. Godly character is more important than gifting and/or technical competence. A leader who has godly character inspires others to godliness by the

² See 1 Tim. 1:4,5,10,11; 2 Tim. 1:13; 1 Tim. 6:3; and especially Titus 2:1-3:8. The structure of most of Paul’s letters orbits around these same two foci (e.g., Romans; Ephesians; Colossians).

³ This is a recurrent theme in the Pastoral Epistles. See also 1 Tim. 1:3,6,7; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 4:3,4; Titus 1:10-16; 3:9-11.

beauty of his character. This integrity brings honor to God, is useful to God, and is prepared for whatever good work God wants him to do (2:21). Unlike inanimate vessels, we can *choose* what kind of character we will have.

How do we acquire this godly character?

- On the one hand, this godly character comes from God (2:23 - “call upon the Lord”). It is the fruit of the Spirit, not mere moral will-power and self-improvement.
- On the other hand, we must go after this with all our hearts. Notice how aggressive the verbs are: “abstain from;” “cleanses himself from;” “flee;” “pursue.”
- We must pursue it “with those who call upon the Lord with a pure heart” (2:23). We cannot grow in godly character without close Christ-centered friendships.

Deal with errant members in a firm and redemptive way (2:24-26)

This is one of several passages in the Pastoral Epistles concerning the ministry of correction⁴ - thus emphasizing the importance of this unpopular and difficult leadership responsibility. In our morally relativistic and therapeutic culture, this may be the most searching test for us. If we don't do this, we are hirelings, and Satan *will* ravage the flock. But if we do this well, we make it easier for our people to repent. When was the last time you confronted errant sheep?

How can we do this? Paul's words here provide us with three key guidelines:

- Move toward them vs. withdraw from them, ignore the elephant in the room, etc.
- Conduct yourself with “kindness” and “patience” and “gentleness” vs. quarreling, blowing up, being self-righteous, etc.

⁴ This passage is one of several similar passages in the Pastoral Epistles which describe a *spectrum* of corrective responses. Timothy is to combine “preaching” the Word with “reproving, rebuking and exhorting” errant Christians with great patience and instruction (2 Tim. 4:2). Timothy and Titus are to authoritatively challenge (“prescribe;” “teach;” “exhort;” “reprove”) Christians to represent Jesus well in their social roles, and to do their best to overcome Christians’ resistance to this (1 Tim. 6:1,2; Titus 2:15). Timothy is to “instruct” certain people not to teach strange doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3). Timothy is to publicly “rebuke” leaders who continue in sin (1 Tim. 5:20). Titus must “silence” rebellious teachers (Titus 1:10,11). Titus is to “reject” factious people after duly warning them (Titus 3:10). Paul refers to having disfellowshipped Hymenaeus and Alexander for blasphemy/false teaching (1 Tim. 1:20).

- Focus *vertically* on what God says by “teaching” and “correcting” and calling them to “repentance” (return to trust in God’s wisdom and goodness) vs. focusing *horizontally* on social conformity, how their sin affects them and others, etc.

It is extremely helpful to have at least one colleague in this ministry. Colleagues can hold each other accountable to take action instead of ignoring the problem. They can counsel together how to approach it, and pray together before taking action. They can sometimes go together to help one another. Leaders who do not have this help usually avoid correction or address it ineffectively.

Keep making progress that your flock can see (1 Tim. 4:12-16)

Finally, here is a very encouraging passage. The command is vs. 15—work hard at making progress in three areas (vs. 12-14), progress that our flocks can see. The promise is in vs. 16—if we do this, we *will* have redemptive impact on our flocks.

Oswald Sanders: “We leaders think our main responsibility is to see that our people are growing—but Paul says our main responsibility is that our people see that we are growing!”

Spiritual influence is not like accumulated capital that automatically gains interest. God grants current spiritual influence only to those who are currently growing.

It is hard work to make progress in these areas,⁵ but the only thing that can prevent us from doing this is us. Determine to keep growing!

⁵ The verbs Paul uses in 4:7-16 are very strenuous: “discipline yourself” (*gymnazo*); “labor (*kophino*) and strive (*agonizomai*);” “take pains with (*melatao*);” “be absorbed in;” “pay close attention to (*epecho*);” “persevere in” (*epimeno*).