

Complementary Leadership

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 16th of January 2005.

The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled Complementary Leadership and is based on 1 Corinthians 3, verses 1-23.

Before I preach tonight, I have to bring a very serious matter before the church.

It's actually a matter that has potential probably to actually split this congregation. I'm actually really sorry that if you're a visitor here tonight that you actually have to hear these things. But I think it's actually appropriate that I start this service and mention these things.

It's become evident to me and to Paul that there are some very serious factions that are forming. There's some jealousy here. There's some quarrelling.

[1 : 07] Particularly since Paul's been away, some are claiming that Paul's the great guru of this church, but others are following myself. As I said, it's quite serious.

It's quite a serious matter that we should have this type of splitting and division and jealousy and quarrelling. And Paul actually knows about this and he's written us a letter.

So we're going to hear from him himself about this serious matter. And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving according to human inclinations?

For when one says, I belong to Paul, and another says, I belong to Apollos, are you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul?

[2 : 25] Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted Apollos, watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants, nor the one who waters, is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

The one who plants, and the one who waters, have a common purpose, and each will receive wages, according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants, working together, you are God's field, God's building.

According to the grace of God, given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care, how to build on it.

For no one can lay any foundation, other than the one that has been laid. That foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation, with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, the work of each builder, will become visible, for the day will disclose it.

Because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test, what sort of work, each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss, the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

[3 : 41] Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools, so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

For it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness. And again, the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile. So let no one boast about human leaders, for all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or life, or death, or the present, or the future.

All belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. Let's pray. Father, we do indeed thank you for the way that you have brought the church together, founded upon Christ.

We pray that you might give us ears and hearts that are open, that we may hear your word, we might understand how we might care for your church, and have godly leaders here. We pray this in through your son's name.

[4 : 54] Amen. Well, that first illustration, if you're a little bit worried, I'm sorry about that, but it was just a little ploy to try and get you to think about what it would have been like back there in Corinth.

Imagine being there in that original church, at Corinth, a church that was planted by Paul. Paul came and preached the word. And there they were, this lovely congregation.

But soon, within this congregation, there's quarrelling and jealousy. And factions start forming where some say, look, I belong to Paul.

He is the great leader of this church. He is a hero. I belong to him. But then others are going, no, no, no, no, no, no. Apollos. He's the one who's the true leader of this church.

And so what you get is these factions, people following different leaders, people putting leaders up on a pedestal and saying, that's what a leader is. There is the power.

[5 : 49] There is the prestige. There is the person who I follow. I belong to them because they are great. That's the picture that we have of this church back in Corinth, a church that is full of factions.

And Paul knows about this. And so he writes to this church and he tells them how disappointed he is. If you notice there in chapter 3, it would be good for you to have your Bibles open.

Obviously, you've picked up that the letter that was read was actually from the Bible. 1 Corinthians chapter 3, we're looking at tonight. Page 927 in the black Bibles in front of you.

I'm so disappointed in this worldly understanding of leadership that the Corinthians have that Paul makes this point here. He calls them brothers and sisters.

That is, he knows that they're Christians but they behave in such a way that he cannot call them spiritual. Look there in verse 1, Paul makes it very clear here that they are infantile.

[7 : 21] They should be grown up and mature Christians. Yet they are still living according to the worldly ways instead of God's ways.

They are behaving in a childish way. I have three beautiful daughters but when they were babies they were great projectile vomiters.

If there was an Olympics for this event, I tell you, my daughters would have won it as babies. They were happy chuckers. That is, they'd be fed some milk and they'd be sitting there and you'd be waiting for it.

You'd have to cover up your whole shoulder with a towel and you might want to cover the floor behind you because at any moment, quite happily, they would vomit this milk back up all over the place.

Happy chuckers they were. They couldn't handle large amounts of milk. Well, these Corinthians are international class projectile vomiters, spiritually speaking.

[8 : 25] They cannot handle solid food. They struggle to hold up anything that goes down them. Anything else they chuck up and they make a mess of anyone that gets in front of them all around them.

They are wretchedly immature. As Freud would call them, they are infantile regression, reverting back to babyhood, having never grown up.

And that's the charge that Paul has against this congregation. The way that they treat their leaders is a worldly way of treating leaders. It is a wrong understanding of Christian leadership.

And we're going to look at that, how Paul attacks this, how Paul undercuts this and he does it using three very good images. The images of agriculture, the building and the temple.

So, have a look there in verse 5. Paul begins by asking two questions, indignant questions. What then is a posse? What is Paul? He asks, what are these people that you're following and holding up as your masters?

[9 : 35] He says, they are servants through whom you came to believe as the Lord assigned to each. Paul makes it very clear here, they're servants.

You treat them as the great masters of the church but they are not the masters. They are the servants of the church. In verses 6 and 7, he goes on to prove his point.

He says there that Paul planted and Apollos watered but look there, God is the one who gives the growth. Now, I have this fantastic vegetable garden in my backyard.

It is a great garden. I've loved being involved in planting this garden. I've been handing out vegetables for weeks now. I've got some great zucchinis and purple beans and leeks and there's

raspberries, there's carrots, there's all sorts of great things.

But when I reflect on this garden that I've planted, I haven't done all the work. I bought some soil but I didn't mix the soil together. In fact, I didn't even deliver the soil here.

[10:38] Someone brought the soil here. One of the other gardens I dug up but in terms of putting the different fertilisers, I had to go to some good friends in the morning congregation who were some of the original fruit people around this area, John and Norma Kent and they told me, well, you need a bit of this fertiliser and a bit of that and you need to get these type of things and even some of the plants that I got, I got from Bunnings and Kmart as little seedlings.

I didn't even plant them. I got them as little seedlings and then put them in the ground. The point is that my garden that I've got there, I can't claim that I've done it all.

I've got other people who are involved in this great little patch of dirt that I've got in my backyard but the most amazing thing about it all is watching it grow.

It's astounding seeing these little plants and little seeds that I put in, like corn. You put the corn in and I've got these huge great stalks. All the information, all the growth, all that happened there.

Just astounding. Paul makes the same point here. Look there in verses 6 and 7. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

[11:53] So neither one who plants nor the one who waters is anything but only God who gives the growth. Paul wants to undercut this attitude of seeing leaders as the great masters. It's not the person who plants.

It's not even the person who waters. They're nothing compared to the great growth that God gives. God is the one who is working in the background. In verse 8, Paul goes further to show how stupid these Corinthians are in their behaviour.

Trying to put this competition between their different leaders, this senseless promoting of different personalities. When we see there in verse 8 that Paul and Apollos actually only have a common goal, why try and put them in competition when they're actually all working for the same purpose. Look there in verse 8. But the one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. And he concludes in verse 9, for we are God's field working together.

Sorry, for we are God's servants working together. You are God's field. Well, the main point of this first analogy of the agricultural image that we've got there is that it is God's field.

[13:17] It is God's activity that really matters. God allocates the task. God gives the growth. God rewards the labourers. The leaders are servants.

Servants of God. God is the one who brings growth and maturity and growth in the numbers of the church.

Therefore, for us, the application for us is we ought to be people who are praying. We ought to be praying for our friends. We ought to be praying that God will be working powerfully in our congregation.

We ought to not think that it depends solely on us and think that we are God's answer to the growth in this church. God is the one who brings the growth.

That's the great message that we've got here in this chapter. But we see in other parts of the Bible I guess the exact opposite where they sit back and think, no, God's the one who's going to do it all.

[14:21] There's nothing for me to do here. Notice, it is God's servants. We need to get a right balance here. We need to be people who are diligent, faithful in our preparation in carrying out our ministry.

But we need to remember God is the one who is responsible for the growth. Therefore, let's not bring glory to the leaders. They're the ones who we oughtn't be putting up on pedestals or ourselves.

But God, we ought to be praising and thanking God for what He is doing. Well, that's the first image that we have here, the agricultural image.

Leaders are only servants of God. The second picture we got there in verse 9b through to 15 is that of a building. God here, the Apostle Paul moves on to this architectural metaphor that we are God's building.

By the grace of God, Paul has laid the foundations we see there in verse 10 that Paul laid these foundations as a skilled master builder and now others are building upon that foundation.

[15 : 36] Now, foundations are very important. It was fascinating watching the building. We live right next door to this building here. It was great watching how they actually did all the foundations.

There was an old tree that had been cut down years and years ago in the middle of the pickering room over there and they actually had to dig out all the soft dirt there because if they just built over the top of it, it would have formed weak foundations.

Foundations are very, very important and Paul makes a point here in verse 11 that the foundations should be those of Jesus Christ and nothing other. For no one can lay any other foundation other than the one that has been laid.

That foundation is Jesus Christ. therefore we ought not to tamper with the foundations. When I was growing up we had this house and I used to love digging in the dirt in the garden.

There was this garden right beside the house and I noticed that underneath the corner of the building was all this great gravel. It was great for building so I kept on digging it out so I could use it for my little roads and things like that and dug under the foundations and much to my horror mum and dad came out one day and saw that I'd sort of dug this hole underneath the foundations and I got in a bit of trouble and I had to quickly pack it back under and hope that the building wouldn't fall down.

[17 : 00] Fortunately it didn't but we ought not to tamper with these foundations. Paul makes that very clear. These foundations of Jesus Christ don't tamper with, don't undermine, don't relay.

This is the right foundations of Jesus Christ. But then in verse 12 he then talks about what's the building on top and Paul warns there that you need to be very careful about leaders, what you build on top of those foundations.

Why? Because it must be able to endure the fire that is to come. So look there in verse 12. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver and precious stones, wood, hay and straw, the work of each builder will become visible.

for the day will disclose it because it will be revealed with fire and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. We see there the three descriptions, gold, silver and precious stones.

These are the ones that Paul says, look, these are the building materials you need to build on. Now we ought not to try and work out, put too much emphasis on the value of the materials but I guess he's trying to look at the things that will last through fire, the gold, silver and precious stones.

[18 : 21] These things will last, the fire but those of wood, hay and straw, those things are things that will be burnt up. Paul says, these are the things that you need to be building on and make sure that you've got appropriate materials that you're building on and make sure that you've got the right understanding of Christian leadership.

The picture there that we have of gold, silver and precious stones are materials that are appropriate for a great and grand building. It reminds us of the Old Testament temple in fact, a temple picture that comes up in a few more moments.

Well, Paul makes a very simple point here. The simple point is be very careful about how you build on the foundation of Christ, the leaders. God cares about his church, cares for it terribly and he's going to reveal what your work was on that end day.

Verse 14, if what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss, the builder will be saved but only as through fire.

The picture we have here is that of a great fire that sweeps through. I grew up in the middle of a pine forest and occasionally we would have fires with great intensity that would burn through the pine forest.

[19 : 55] We've just seen forest fires that have burnt through in South Australia and you get these pictures of people walking through the ruins of their house, picking up some the fragments of their life.

Some people not even able to face the great loss of all that time and energy they've put into their building. All that money making it look good, all the paint jobs, all the woodwork, everything gone, burnt down, right down to the foundations and all that's left is a charred mess such as the loss.

So it's the picture here for Christian leaders. There will be some Christian leaders on that great day of judgement that will suffer badly where all their work will be shown for what it really is.

Straw, hay and wood burnt to the ground, all that time and energy. Therefore, as leaders, take care how you look after God's church.

God cares for his church intensely and this is picked up in the third analogy, that of the temple. Turn the page and have a look there in verses 16 and 17. The third picture that we have here is that of the temple.

[21 : 18] So this building, this edifice that God is talking about here, this local congregation, it's God's temple. Now the temple as we look back in the Old Testament is a grand structure, it was a place, the meeting place between God and his people.

But now that Christ has come and the Holy Spirit has come, the local congregation, the people are God's holy temple. God cares for it, cares for it greatly.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. For God, the local congregation is of great importance. It has enormous dignity. It is God's temple. His spirit dwells amongst them. It is precious and God cares for them. God cares for this congregation that much. He has an intense jealousy for this congregation.

[22 : 27] congregation. Therefore, anyone who should destroy this congregation will be held accountable for it. Therefore, if you are a part of this congregation, part of this church serving here as a leader in any way, whether it be through music or the kitchen, whether you are involved in the creche in the morning, whether you are involved in the children's holiday program this week, whatever your contribution, think about how you conduct yourself.

This is God's building. We ought to be encouraging one another. We ought to be reminding each other of God's intense jealousy for his people. We ought to be careful that there isn't factionalism where people are split, holding up leaders in an ungodly and worldly way.

So, the two main points up to this point so far is Christian leaders are only servants of God. And the second thing is God cares about his church and holds its leaders accountable.

Well, we come to the third thing here, that all things are ours. In verses 18 through to 23, Paul wraps up his perspective on the matter. He brings it all to a head here.

The Christians, the Corinthian Christians, belittled God's church by exalting their human leaders. And Paul says, that's folly. That's a worldly understanding of things.

[23 : 57] That's not wisdom. That's worldly wisdom. Wisdom is having a right understanding of the leaders. So, he says there in verse 18, do not deceive yourselves.

If you think you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness.

And again, the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise and they are futile. It is foolish to hold up leaders in a worldly way.

Paul says that is folly. We ought to be, as in verse 21, so let no one boast about human leaders, for all things are yours.

Paul says, don't boast about your human leaders. That is a worldly thing to do. We ought to be a people who understand this.

[24 : 59] The Corinthians needed to repent of their boastfulness, their self-centred human understanding, their wisdom that they thought they had. They needed to develop a new humility, summed up by that slogan, no more boasting about men.

This is the climax of the passage. To finish up with, in the final verses there, that final segment, he brings it all to a close.

Instead of taking pride in their leaders, claiming to belong to them, the exact opposite is true. So, instead of saying, I belong to Paul or I belong to Apollos, Paul is saying, no, no, no, no, it's the exact opposite.

They belong to you. They are servants for you. All things are yours. Whether Paul or Apollos or Kephas, which is Peter, these leaders here, you don't belong to them.

They're not your masters. They belong to you. They are your servants. You need to remember that. But then we have this extraordinary thing.

[26 : 05] Not only is it the leaders that belong to them, Paul then says, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future, all belong to you. Paul gives this list of things, things that all belong to the Corinthian church.

It's an incredible statement that he makes here. You see, in many ways, this list here is the list that the world wants. It's the great tyranny of this world, isn't it?

It's what we want from leadership. We want power and prestige. We want the world. We want the future. We want life and death. We want it all ourselves. But Paul says, look, they're trying to do it through a worldly understanding is wrong.

Those things belong to you, but in a far richer way, a far richer heritage, all brought by the precious blood of Christ.

You see, it's in Christ that these things are ours. We have a new world. We have a new future. Life and death is ours, life.

[27 : 15] Death has been won over by Christ. We have a great and glorious future. This is a great list that Paul puts here.

And you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. We live in a world that esteems leadership. They love to have power and prestige. There are great courses that you can do. There are so many books about how you can become highly effective in your leadership, describing how you might climb up the ladder of success, how you might gain that power and prestige, how you might have the world and life, the present, the future, all the honour and glory.

Well, Paul paints a very different picture about Christian leadership. It's a picture that we need to understand if we are to be leaders. here's a picture that understands leaders as servants of God. It needs to understand where they trust in this great God. Understanding that it is God who cares about his church and he will hold leaders accountable for what they do.

[28 : 34] Therefore, we ought to hear these words and apply them to our lives for those who are leaders or aiming to be leaders one day in this church.

For those who may not aspire to leadership, these are still important words for us to understand how we might live our lives, not trying to exalt leaders in an ungodly way.

We need to be people who are godly in all that we do, having a right understanding of God's church. Amen.