

with true leadership

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[0 : 00] I'm glad when I was being looked at to lead St. Paul's about five and a half years ago that I didn't get a job description like this one shoved under my nose. It reads, First Presbyterian Church of Warrington, South Carolina, is yet again seeking a senior minister.

Duties include all preaching and teaching responsibilities for Sunday morning and Sunday nights with exegetical sermons and average length of 45 minutes. Pastor will also be responsible for all teaching on Wednesday nights and the adult Sunday school class.

In addition, we are currently without a youth pastor and so the pastor will also be temporarily responsible for all youth activities, Bible studies and fellowships. The pastor is also responsible for all hospital, shut-in, sick visitations for members, former members, close friends of either, as well as any family of the stated by a relationship, a fourth cousin, twice removed or better.

The pastor will be expected to plan and lead an annual mission trip and coordinate all funding activities for the trip. The pastor will be available to 24 hours, seven days a week to talk with any member of the congregation or the above stated persons either face-to-face or on the phone. Furthermore, the pastor will be held personally, directly responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of every member of the congregation. The pastor will be expected to attend all sporting, special sporting events of the youth of the church, including all homecoming events, chaperoning the high school dance, prom night, playoffs and any chair leading competitions or functions.

[1 : 32] Furthermore, we highly encourage ministry to persons in the community at large beyond ministry within the church, so far as it does not interfere with the immediate responsibilities to the above stated persons associated with our congregation.

The pastor will also be present at all session meetings, deacament meetings and all committee meetings. The pastor will also be available for all funerals and weddings of any of the above stated person, regardless of when it occurs or what personal circumstances might be going in his life or in his family's life.

Duties are expected to take approximately 40 hours a week. Inquiries may be made to ruling elder Dave Wellington Sr., ruling elder Dave Wellington Jr. or ruling elder Dave Wellington III.

In fact, if a job description of that was put under my nose, I wouldn't be here. I'm pretty sure that that's a joke. I mean, I hope it's a joke.

But given the response of some people who made online to that so-called ad, I'm not sure.

[2 : 44] There are a number of pastors out there who resonated quite painfully with that job description. That is, they were burnt out with expectations.

Now, if you were writing the requirements of the Christian leader, what would you include? What would you put down? Not sure? 1 Corinthians 4 helps us.

It helps us to see what Christian leadership is all about and some of the things we should look for in our leadership. You see, the church at Corinth was like the Olympics, something like ice skating competition at the Olympics, where the church is sitting over there in the judges' panel, and based on the performance of their leaders, they held up their scorecards.

And it was based purely on personal preferences, not on anything else, but on personal preferences and expectations. There was an unhealthy habit of different groups in the church associating themselves with different and various well-known Christian leaders, while at the same time putting all the other groups and the other leaders down.

These believers in Corinth were adopting too many leadership models from the surrounding world. They were infatuated with great orators, show of knowledge and philosophical teachings, and they were judging their leaders according to what was valued in the marketplace at Corinth.

[4 : 18] Many of them prized form above content, prestige above humility, knowledge above confessions of ignorance and human limitations of knowledge, rhetoric above truth, money above people, and reputation above integrity.

They had taken their eyes off the one that they followed, the crucified Messiah, the Lord Jesus. And so Paul now gives some advice on the sort of leaders that they should in fact be lining up to follow, and this is the closing off of this whole section of chapters 1 to 4 on factions in the church.

And this is meant to kill the factions in the church. And the first thing they're to look for in a leader is someone who leads to please Jesus first and foremost.

He says in verse 1, so chapter 1 Corinthians 4, verse 1, So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.

Two elements stand out, and both of them are tied to things Paul's already explained in chapters 2 and 3. Firstly, Christian leaders are to see themselves simply as servants of one particular master.

[5 : 33] They serve Jesus Christ. And secondly, at the heart of their commission that they've received from their master Jesus lies one particular assignment, and that is they're entrusted with the secret things of God.

And these two elements actually merge into one. What it means to be a servant of Christ is an obligation to promote the gospel of the crucified Christ by both word and by example.

And that is absolutely fundamental. I would go as far as to say that there is no valid Christian leadership that does not throb with that priority.

The Christian leaders here must prove faithful to this fundamental task, and they must prove faithful to the one who has assigned them to that task.

Notice, they're not to prove faithful to the church, but faithful to the one who has assigned them to the task, to Jesus Christ.

[6 : 42] And so leaders must make sure that they're not trying to win popularity contests within the church. And that's what Paul means when he says in verse 3, I care very little if I'm judged by you or by any human court.

That is, there is only one person who's well done on the last day actually means anything to Paul. And he plays accordingly. Once upon a time, many years ago, before age and injury, I used to play soccer, football, that sort of stuff.

Any opportunity I did, I got. And what I noticed in both sports, in fact, in most sports, when you've got people on the sidelines watching you play, that whenever they cheered, it meant well done.

And what you tried to do was do it again. And so you score a goal, something like that, you know, run over with a try and clap and you go, and you go, I must do that again.

[7 : 44] I must try hard to do that again. In my later life of sport, I found it more difficult to score tries and I found that I got bigger cheers from my side when I took out the opposition instead.

And so I'd clobber some poor young 18-year-old running down the... I couldn't catch him. But if I did, I was clobbering him. And so the cheer, way from my side.

But if my side ever went, oh, you know, you'd make a mistake, you'd drop the ball or something like that. Mental note, don't do that again. You were playing the game based on the applause on the sidelines.

And I think what Paul's saying here is to Christian leaders, and I want to say to you as Christians as well, who's in your grandstand? Who's on the sidelines cheering you? What Paul's saying here is there's only one person who it actually matters who's in the grandstand or on the sidelines.

And that's Jesus. And Paul's saying that I lead as a Christian leader to get his applause and no one else's. Not my parents, whether they be dead or alive.

[8 : 54] Not friends, not society, not even the church. Not even you, Corinthians, are on the sideline. I don't play to you guys. He says in verse 4, it is the Lord who judges me.

The Christian leader's ultimate allegiance must be to the church. Must not be to the church, sorry, or to any individual leader or to any tradition. It must be to the Lord alone.

Now, don't hear me wrongly here. I'm not trying to milk this passage for more than it's actually saying. Paul does not mean that there is no place in his life for self-examination or self-discipline.

His own writings in 1 Corinthians 9, which we'll get to a little bit later, and 2 Corinthians 13 make it absolutely clear. He's not abolishing functions of judgment and accountability in the church.

Paul is not absolving Christians from the responsibility to discern behavior and teaching from the scriptures. He is condemning the kind of judging that's happening here in Corinth, though, that sits

on the sideline and gives a low score to a Christian leader purely based on personal preferences. [10:02] That this Christian leader, they're writing off Christian leaders because they don't fit neatly into my camp or they don't, they seem to compete with my personal preferences and they're not in my pocket.

Paul's condemning that kind of judgment. And you know, the best part of this paragraph is the way it ends. With the final day of judgment in view, Paul might have expected to say, at that time, that is, the Christian leader will receive his rebuke from God.

You know, because that's what he's receiving from all these Corinthians, criticism, rebuke. They're always telling him, you've got it wrong, you know, and he's expecting that maybe God might do that too, but instead he says, at that time, each will receive his praise from God.

How delightful. At least in this case, God raises his scorecard from the grandstand on his servants entrusted with the gospel and his judgment is less severe than the self-appointed judges of the church in Corinth.

The king of the universe is a wise father who knows how to encourage even the weakest efforts of his children who have laboured, laboured, laboured for one thing, his approval at the end.

[11:33] Well done, good and faithful servant. On the last day, God himself will praise him. And so the Christian leader has one spectator.

One spectator and his assessment is the only assessment that counts. That's the first thing to look for in your leaders is someone who leads to please Jesus first and foremost.

The second thing to look for in Christian leaders is a life that exemplifies the humility of the cross itself. This is the heart of the problem at Corinth.

Have a look there. Notice verse 6 and 7. He uses words like pride and boast. Pride is their problem. They are boasting about various skills and insights of their various leaders and the irony is that they're actually boasting about things that are purely gifts from God.

Paul argues here that if you've received some special help or insight or strength from one particular leader, isn't that simply one of God's fine gifts to you?

[12:44] That's how it should be seen. And if it's a gift, then it shouldn't cause a sense of pride within you.

Is this not true of anything that we value? You know, when we get applauded, how often do we humbly transfer the applause to its true source?

How often do we do that? Well, given on what we just sang, apparently we do it all the time. Did we not just sing every blessing you pour out will turn back to praise?

We sang it with gusto, I'm assuming we must. And yet, the reality is, intellectually, we know God is the source of every blessings, but our hearts just love the applause.

Every time we get applauded, it puffs us up. Quack. Quack. Quack. Quack. Which is what the word pride and boasting actually means in 1 Corinthians.

[13:57] It puffs us up. It blows us up to make us look big and great. It feeds our pride. And verse 7 is meant to cut away all sense of pride.

Verse 7 is like a pin to the balloon. And he puts his finger here in verse 7 on the central problem. Their assessments as this church at Corinth is judging its leaders, their assessment and their judgment is based on their pride deep in their hearts.

You see, they thought the assessments of their leaders was because they had superior knowledge and superior intellect. And Paul says, no, it's not. It's actually the pride that's in your heart.

When they vote on their leaders, they were actually standing in judgment of their leaders and standing in judgment over their leaders. And so when they said we follow Paul because we love this about Paul, they were actually putting themselves over the top of Paul, not following Paul.

And so Paul's language here is now steeped in biting irony. The Corinthians have become smug and self-satisfied and self-assured and comfortable and proud. Verse 8, already you have all that you want.

[15:23] Of course, with the result that they do not hunger for the maturity that they do not yet have. Already you have become rich and so they do not seek spiritual wealth because they think they already have it.

And you have become kings or better, you have begun your reign and so they reign over the top of each other and over the top of even the leaders that they say that they follow.

Their confession of being followers of the Lord Jesus doesn't actually match with their lives. Compare them with the apostles, the actual acknowledged leaders of the church.

Verse 9, for it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession like men condemned to die in the arena. The imagery that he draws on here is that of the triumphal processions of returning Roman legions from victory in battle.

What used to happen was they would this big line up sort of like a ticker tape parade, doors of the city, gates of the city would open, the big generals would ride in and their chariots and people would throw flowers or whatever they do, I don't know, and all praise, the big applause for those right at the beginning and then right at the end of the procession is the lowest of the low, the slaves of the slaves and they're the ones who are eating everyone else's dust and walking through everyone else's filth and Paul says, you think that we're at the beginning, you praise the guys that are at the beginning, we're actually right at the end here, this is who I am and what's my destiny?

[17:06] Destiny is for the arena, these slaves in the triumphal procession of the Roman generals would die at the hands of gladiators or be thrown to the wild beasts just for the amusement of everyone who's bought a ticket and he says, what's at stake here, I think, in this paragraph is a fundamental stance of weighing and looking at things for the Christian.

what Paul's saying here, it is impossible, it is the opposite of the pride and arrogance and boasting of Corinth. He says, we follow a crucified Messiah and all the future promises of perfect eternity, all the blessings of sin forgiven and the blessings of the Spirit of God do not negate the fact that the good news that we present focuses on the foolishness of the cross of Christ and therefore we are foolish to the world.

It's a message that simply cannot be communicated from a position of pride and arrogance and triumphalism. They are in conflict with each other.

To do so actually negates the gospel. Until Jesus returns the Christian is to take up their cross. That is, we are to die to self-interest daily. We are servants of Christ. We follow Jesus. What does that look like? Verse 11, to this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we're in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.

[18:49] Taking up your cross means sacrifice. It means personal ambition and comfort and security are pushed to one side. And taking up your cross also means that we walk the same sacrificial, other person-centered, loving relational path that the Lord Jesus walked.

Verse 12, when we are cursed, we bless. That's foolish in the eyes of the world. When we are persecuted, we endure it. That's foolish in the eyes of the world. When we are slandered, we answer kindly. That's foolish in the eyes of the world.

But we follow Christ. And it's not the applause of the world that we seek. It is the applause at the end of the time that says, well done. The less any society knows of this way, the more foolish we will seem and the more suffering we will endure.

And so be it. There is no other way to follow Jesus. And leaders in the church will suffer the most because they lead this way by their life as much as their words.

[19:58] But in the end, all Christians are called to this vision of life. And I think that Paul, I think for us, the reason why Paul's stance here seems so alien to us is that we have unwittingly become more like the Corinthian Christians than we have of Paul.

many of us are so well-to-do, comfortable, with little incentive to live in vibrant anticipation of Christ's return.

Our desire for the approval of the world, the approval of colleagues and family and friends often outstrips our desire for Jesus to say, well done.

And so my friends, look for Christian leaders whose lives exemplify the humility of the cross-shaped life. The third thing is look for Christian leaders who will encourage and when necessary enforce the cross-shaped life in those that they lead.

Paul begins with the gentler alternative despite the biting irony that he's just deployed in the previous paragraph. Paul now says in verse 14, I'm not writing this to shame you but to warn you as my dear children.

[21:19] Now at one level he is shaming them but that's not the reason why he writes. He writes to warn them. That is to admonish them, to correct them, to encourage them to follow the way of the cross.

Paul reminds them that he led them to the Lord and in the first place he tells them that even if they've got 10,000 guardians they've only got one father in Christ. Paul was the one who first brought the gospel to the Corinthians and in that sense he says I am your father and because I'm your father verse 16 I urge you to imitate me.

Now remember he's speaking in first century here and in the first century basically sons followed their fathers so if your dad was a baker basically guarantee you're going to be a baker.

Not much you know they didn't have options there. Sheep farmer you're going to be a sheep farmer. The son was expected to carry on the family business the family values the family heritage the family name and Paul argues that if I'm your father to the Corinthians therefore you need to imitate me as your father follow me as your father and in the context of these chapters what Paul wants them to imitate is his passion to live a life shaped by the cross.

He does not expect them to suffer in exactly the same way that he does he does not demand that they all become apostles and they all go to plant churches off in far distant lands what he does expect of them is that they will imitate his values his priorities his cross shaped lifestyle and his valuation of the exclusive centrality of the gospel of the crucified Messiah and so in verse 17 we see he's going to send along some help to help them get this one straight verse 17 for this reason I am sending to you Timothy my son whom I love who is faithful in the Lord notice that Timothy the son is faithful in the Lord following his father and he will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church this is not just for the Corinthians this lifestyle is for everywhere in every church Paul is not sending Timothy simply to lay out some more teaching but to remind the Corinthians of Paul's way of life in Christ

[23 : 47] Jesus his way of life and he gives us the impression here that the biggest problem for the Corinthian church is that they were not living up to what they knew to be true you see maturity is not about how much you know but whether or not you're living out what you know judging by these first four chapters many of the Corinthians were not making the connection between what they believed and how they should live you see these Corinthians would be the first to insist that Jesus died for their sins that he rose again but they could not grasp how this historical reality not only achieved their salvation but in fact may must shape the way that they live day by day and as we see in the coming chapters the gospel wasn't shaping their attitude to things like sex dating conflicts marriage singleness food communion corporate worship use of gifts authority love status a whole bunch of things the gospel wasn't shaping for them a surprising number of

Christians cannot easily make the connection between the truth of the gospel and how to live it is possible to define theologically rich words like propitiation but not know what it's like to feel forgiven it's possible to defend the priority of grace in salvation but still feel that I'm not good enough for God there's a disconnect between what we know and how we live what we experience of God and part of the role of faithful Christian leadership is to make the connections between creed and conduct between the cross and the cross shaped life and that is why we've got as a church here core values at St Paul's those core values are explicit in behavioural expectations if you say this you hold to this truth it will look like this in practice that's what core values do and the fact is we've all got values we've all got core values ourselves as individual they are held down deep within us and every one of those core values shape the way we behave so for instance if you grew up in a truly patriotic Australian family that valued Holden cars as patriotic above every other thing in the world as every other vehicle every other car and all these imports and Japanese imports and stuff are just all rubbish Holden cars they're the way to go what that means is when you buy a car you will buy a Holden car that is what you believe what you value will transfer into a particular action and if in the same family you didn't just value Holden cars as patriotic but you also valued success then you'll buy the best Holden car these values will shape your particular actions that's what they do and so if we say that Jesus the gospel is our greatest treasure then it will shape how we live it will shape our priorities and so the Christian leader must love in love admonish correct encourage to see that confession and actions are aligned and they must exemplify this connection in their own lives now let me just say if in your life you haven't made the connection between the good news and how to live then the proper place to begin to make that change change in fact of the deep betrayal of the cross shaped life is in fact the cross itself in humble confession if your life does not match the gospel that you confess the only place to go is the cross in humble confession and in that place and with that attitude you will find a

God who will say to you well done well done and so bringing the people of God to consistent Christian living in the light of the gospel of the crucified Messiah is so important to Paul that he will not be turned from that goal he sees this as an essential function of Christian leadership if he moves the church by encouragement and admonition that is great if however the arrogant in verses 18 and 19 don't move then severer discipline is called for and Paul offers the Corinthians a choice in verse 21 what do you prefer shall I come with you with a whip or in love and with a gentle spirit now he does not mean of course that if he comes with a whip he's not coming in love he doesn't say well I'll be gentle and encouraging to start with that's loving but if you if you spurn my love then I'm going to whip out the six guns and then I'm not going to love you anymore and I'm going to basically get you all to come into line he's not saying that the contrast refers to the manner or the form of his coming not the motive of his coming a smack still hurts even if it comes from a father who insists that he's smacking his son because he loves him it is much better for a son to change his behaviour so that the manner of the father's coming will not be with discipline but with a gentle spirit now let me just say that this is the toughest one I think this is what we don't like when you put this kind of accountability into a culture that is anti authoritarian and in an age of consumerism and individualism and narcissism it makes godly

Christian leadership very hard in this age our self worth is affronted by any negative feedback any rebuke any correction is like a personal attack on me and my character individualism means that we fly by our own rules when our sense of self esteem is challenged what we tend to do is we run from it we turn our back on any form of correction and as a result we run we change jobs we change schools we change courses we change partners we change churches based on what will suit me and puff me up and we never grow up just like little children if I line my three girls up here and say girls tell us all what are the ways that I as your father love you they would say when you buy us ice cream and particularly chocolate chip mint ice cream they would say when you buy us toys they would say when you wrestle with us they would say when you lie down and pat us when we go to bed at night they would come up with all these nice lovey-dovey stuff that we do and I do love them but I do give them those things none of them would say oh actually you really love us when you put us over there in the time out corner for a bit because they don't like that you really love us when you refuse to buy me that car that the orange car that I walk past the Toyota

[31 : 39] I want that car it's orange no they never say that because and that is the world in which they live in which we live you love me when you puff me up when you do what you want me to do and Paul says he no actually it's both I want you to not be puffed up I want you to grow up in maturity in Christ and discipline and rebuke and correction is part of that process as much as it is for my kids it is for the children of God and so it is only the wise and the mature who thank you for correcting them the Corinthian mistake can very quickly become our mistake I follow Paul I follow Paulus I follow the church down the road because they suit me and we hold up our scorecards based on personal preferences and not on biblical standards and so I wonder what you would have written in the job description

St Paul's Chatswood seeking a mature Christian leader who number one sees themselves as answerable to the Lord Jesus and not our personal preferences St Paul's Chatswood is seeking a mature Christian leader who number two demonstrates the cross shaped life in their priorities in their actions and in their words St Paul's Chatswood seeking a mature Christian leader who number three has the courage to encourage and to enforce the cross shaped life amongst God's people even when we don't want them to so that we might grow up together in maturity in Christ may we score highly on that kind of leadership at St Paul's Amen females N