

Moral Leadership Development Today

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Enduring Values for Leadership Development

Drawn from a Study of 1 Timothy

As the popularity of leadership theories come and go, the life and battles of the first century church remain as a constant light illuminating the issues facing church leadership development today. This paper examines the values, culture, and struggles of the early church through the lens of Paul's First Letter to Timothy, written to redirect the focus of God's people to God's honor through discernment of true from false teachers. In Timothy, God provides His values, His transcendent objective, and His marching orders for church leadership throughout the ages.

This paper will examine all of 1 Timothy since the first century church would have read this letter in its entirety (Dean and Church "Letter"). The letter reveals its theme through an *inclusió* (Campbell 189-190), a stylistic device using the same theme in the beginning and the end of a text to form "a literary envelope" with an overarching message (Carson 37). Paul's goal is to convince Timothy and the church in Ephesus to live godly lives (1 Tim. 1:16-17; 6:15-16; Campbell 191-192), and to preserve their relationship with God (1:5). His goal is to endure in the fight against false teaching (1:3-11, 19-20; 4:1-10; 6:3-5, 20-21) and to discern truth from falsehood based on God's Word.

From this context, this paper will identify Paul's Spirit-given concern about the spiritual vitality of the church, the capacity and willingness of God's leaders to battle falsehood over the long-term, and the commitment and knowledge to teach God's truth. The result overlaid on a picture of our current society and culture will reveal God's enduring passion for His fictive

family; the battles faced by the family of God; and the determination, understanding, and skills necessary to fight the battle. The challenge will be for today's leaders to prepare and develop leaders for tomorrow who value Spirit-led discernment based on God's Word, who value godliness, who value their relationship with God, and who value endurance in battle.

The Challenge Facing Timothy

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to battle false teachers for the true faith (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:20-21) and to redirect people to giving honor to God (1:16-17; 6:15-16). He exhorted Timothy to discern falsehood and to fight against false teachers' (1:3, 6-10, 4:1-3, 10, 5:19-20, 6:3-5,9-15,17-19,20-21) and to model godly living (1:5, 12-16, 18-19, 2:1-2, 3:1-15, 4:6-8, 12-16, 5:1-3, 19-23, 6:11-16, 20-21). Besides encouraging Timothy to fight the good fight, he directed Timothy to teach others truth (1:3, 5, 2:5-15, 3:1-13, 15-16, 4:1-5, 11, 5:1-25, 6:17-19).

The vast contrast between Timothy's culture and the standard for kingdom life within God's fictive family demanded leaders who could discern truth from falsehood (Wells 176; 1Tim. 1:3-4). To combat those who are trying to dissuade believers from the true Gospel, Paul lists qualifications for spiritual leaders to help Timothy and others discern the true from the false teachers (1Tim. 3:1-13; Wells 212-213).

The recipients of Paul's First Letter to Timothy lived in the Greco-Roman society and culture – a culture counter to the world Paul sought for the church. The Greco-Roman society and culture, coupled with the efforts of the Jewish legalists (1 Tim. 1:7), acted as a powerful negative driving force on the first century church (Vos 388-389; Wright 385, 420). It was a battle; a battle Paul committed himself to winning with a sense of urgency to counter the false teaching in every way possible (Kelly 10).

Contrasting Cultural Honor-Shame and Godly Honor-Shame

In the first century, individuals saw themselves enmeshed in their family and community (Malina 62). They needed the extended family connections (kinship) as a foundation for personal identity; the extended family expectations and the opinions of significant people formed the basis for behavior (62-66). In the minds of the people, the idea of honor-shame provided a basis for judging individual behavior and a significant driving force in both behavior and individual relationships (67).

Honor—“the worth or value of persons both in their own eyes and in the eyes of their village or neighborhood” (Neyrey 5)—provided a driving force influencing behavior and relationships (Malina and Rohrbaugh 309-311; Robbins 76-77). While a person could have honor simply because the community considered the person’s family as a honorable family, a person could acquire honor through the skill of public debate – a debate form referred to as “challenge-riposte (Malina & Rohrbaugh 309-311). Acquiring more honor created relationship problems in a culture holding to a philosophy of limit-good (324-325). Whenever one gained honor the other person must lose honor and therefore experience shame (310).

There are two types of shame. First, a negative “shame” is the shame of losing in a challenge-riposte encounter or losing respect in the community (Malina & Rohrbaugh 309-311). The second “shame” is a sensitivity to one’s reputation or the reputation of the family (309-311). This “positive” shame exhortation might sound like, “Have you no shame? Have you no concern about your reputation or our group reputation?”

When Jesus introduced the “Kingdom of God” (Matt. 5-7; John 18:36), He shifted the foundations of thinking about honor-shame (Wells 172). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus redefined how His disciples are to play the honor-shame game (Neyrey 12). Moreover, God bases honor-shame on His holiness (1 Timothy 6:13-16); therefore, for a follower of Christ “honor-

shame, in their deepest and truest meanings, have to do with our standing before God” (Wells 171). In the inclusion bookends in 1 Timothy, Paul addresses honor-shame encounters when he instructs Timothy to refocus their attention back to God as the One deserving our honor through our praise (1:16-17; 6:13-16). Only God gives true honor; contrary to first century culture, it does not come from people or this world.

Paul tells Timothy to avoid engaging in the public honor-shame debates which glorify men (1 Tim. 1:4-7, 6:20-21). These characteristics separated the true teachers from false teachers because without a focus on God as the source of honor, the false teachers “opposed the true Gospel” and lead “morally questionable lives” (Kelly 10). Paul reminded Timothy the goal of his instruction is “love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5) – in contrast to the self-centered interests of the false teachers (1:6-7; 6:3-5).

Paul’s Characteristics for First Century Church Leaders

Paul’s list of leader behaviors in 1 Timothy 3 provided Timothy with information to help him discern the true teachers from the false teachers of the time (Mappes 212). Surprisingly, the list compares to and is a recontextualization (Malina & Rohrbaugh 13) of the dominant characteristics described in “Jewish, pagan, and Christian sources” (Mappes 208) and matches the ethical expectations of the population at large (207). If 1 Timothy 3 is not a list of Paul’s expected characteristics for Christian leaders, what does Paul expect? Paul gives Timothy what he considers the enduring values and therefore behaviors of Godly leaders.

Leaders value godliness and therefore lead godly lives (1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 5-6, 11) through their “speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity” (4:12). Campbell points out that Paul mentions godliness eight times in 1 Timothy (198). In 1 Timothy 4:7, Paul said that godliness was a characteristic for leaders to pursue (198), even though Paul does not mention godliness in the chapter 3 list of leadership characteristics. Leaders value their relationship with God (God’s

love in them) and therefore evidence “a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5). Leaders value endurance in the battle and therefore evidence the strength to continue to “fight the good fight”, to continue “keeping the faith”, and to maintain “a good conscience” (1:18-19; 6:12). Leaders value Spirit-led discernment based on God’s Word evidenced by a hunger for nourishment and true doctrine from the Word (4:6).

Analysis of Contemporary Social and Cultural Issues

Today, American culture differs from Jesus’ day considerably, not the least of which is the core of our self-understanding. In the first century church people saw themselves as a member of a group; today people see themselves as autonomous individuals (Wells 164). Today, shame is a concern only to how the individual perpetrator looks to others – whether he or she would look foolish or incompetent replaces a concern for the reputation of the family or group (167). The idea of guilt or shame has changed from a social issue to a psychological issue (167).

Today we are facing a fight similar to the battle facing Paul and Timothy with an equally determined body of false teachers and false doctrine. The public access media bombards people with immoral material. Advertising and the cultural spending frenzy has resulted in an idolatry of materialism even among Christians. Wells argues that the church is experiencing “a hollowing out of evangelical conviction” (3). There has been a loss in the belief the Bible is authoritative and a wearing away of personal character (3) – an issue that Paul attacked in his day. Wells also argues that comparing and contrasting those claiming spiritual rebirth and those who admit to being “secularists,” “no discernible ethical differences are evident” (3) and “the church is losing its voice” (20).

The problems may not be just the false teachers and false doctrine; some of the problem may be in the church itself. One question facing the church is whether church leaders possess the values and resultant behaviors it will take to surface and fight against the false doctrine and false

teachers. Possibly many pastors have become part of the core of false teachers without even realizing it; their inability to discern may be the problem.

According to a Barna survey, the average Protestant pastor believes that 70% of the adults in their church place Christ as their first priority, while only 15% of the adults agreed (January 10, 2006). Why the difference? The answer Barna discovered is that “few pastors rely on criteria that reflect genuine devotion to God” (January 10, 2006). David Kinnaman of the Barna Group said, “people’s moral profile is more likely to resemble that of their peer group than it is to take shape around the tenets of a person’s faith” (October 31, 2006).

The Need Today

The need today for true Christian leaders is just as great, if not greater than in the first century church. To provide a light to the nation, the church needs leaders who are wholly committed to honoring God and living to please Him. To counteract immorality, the church needs leaders who value godliness and lead godly lives through “speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). To provide hope for a confused people, the church needs leaders who value their relationship with God (God’s love in them) and therefore evidence “a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5). To maintain a constant assertive yet loving message to people, the church needs leaders who value endurance in the battle and therefore evidence the strength to continue to “fight the good fight,” to continue “keeping the faith,” and to maintain “a good conscience”. To help steer believers away from the false teaching of our society, the church needs leaders who value Spirit-led discernment based on God’s Word evidenced by a hunger for nourishment and true doctrine from the Word.

Summary

The text of 1 Timothy analyzed through the lens of cultural analysis provides timeless and enduring leadership values and expected leadership behaviors providing a platform for

leadership development today. Paul's standards for leaders are just as applicable today as they were for Paul's time.

The first century church needed leaders who were wholly committed to honoring God and living to please Him; who valued godliness; who valued their relationship with God; who valued endurance in the battle; and who valued Spirit-led discernment based on God's Word. We have the same need today. The battle we fight today is the same battle Paul and Timothy fought, turning the hearts of people away from falsehood to a full life as a member of the family of God.

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