

INTRODUCTION

Leadership

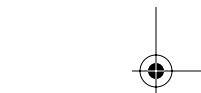


A leader, according to its simplest definition, is someone who commands a following. To lead is to go ahead, to show the way and to inspire other people to follow.

Leaders are needed in every walk of life. Leadership is not restricted to world statesmen, national top brass, the opinion-formers who dominate the media and the senior executives of multinationals. Leaders can also be influential in their local community: teachers in the school, students in the university, parents in the home and many others.

Leadership is a word shared by Christians and non-Christians alike, but this does not mean that their concept of it is the same. On the contrary, Jesus introduced into the world a new style of servant-leadership. He said:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.





Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. (Mk 10:42-44)

The most influential leader in the early church was undoubtedly the apostle Paul. Appointed by Jesus as the apostle to the Gentiles, he never lost his vision of God's single new humanity, Jews and Gentiles together, for which he suffered painful opposition and imprisonment. And in his letters we watch him exercising his leadership skills.

Of course, Paul was an apostle and we are not. Indeed, as I shall argue shortly, there are no apostles in the church today who have an authority comparable to that of the apostle Paul.

Nevertheless, Jesus Christ has evidently intended from the beginning that his church should be shepherded, or have pastoral guidance. So from the first missionary journey onward Paul appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23), and he later instructed Timothy and Titus to do the same, giving instructions as to what kind of people pastors should be (1 Tim 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9).

In the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, which form the basic text of this book, Paul is responding to the complex Corinthian situation and the questions the Corinthians have addressed to him. He does so with admirable clarity, wisdom, humility, love and gentleness: pastoral qualities that are sorely needed by Christian leaders today.

