

I Corinthians 3:4-9

Spiritual attitudes toward Spiritual leaders

- Leaders play an important role in any community and this is especially true in the church (the Body of Christ).
 1. The Bible is a story of leaders and followers.
 2. We are created as social creatures and in any social system there will be leaders and followers.
- The health of any community can be measured in the nature and quality of the relationship between its leaders and followers.
- It is all too easy for believers to resist leaders and make their ministry burdensome. For this reason we are repeatedly encouraged to respond to leadership with respect.

I Cor.16:15-16 “Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), ¹⁶ that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.”

I Tim. 5:17-19 “¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “*You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,*” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” ¹⁹ Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.”

I Pet.5:5 “You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*”

Heb.13:17 “Obey your leaders, and submit {to them}; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

- How can you know if your personal preferences are too important?
 1. How much of the quality of your life is linked to the pastor?
 2. How much does your personal style preference shape your evaluation of the whole church?
 3. How much real contact do you have with those who do not share your vision or style?
 4. How much does the diversity of the church irritate you?
- But this is not the only concern and challenge that believers face. It is possible to error in the opposite direction by giving too much (or the wrong kind of) respect to leaders. See apptoteach.org theology file #811
 1. Herod was judged by God when he allowed himself to be revered as a God. Acts 12:21-23
 2. Paul and Barnabas in Lystra were treated as “Gods” and were quick to challenge the people to repent of such a belief. Acts 14:14-15
 3. Peter faced the same challenge in Acts 10:26.

- This subject is faced head on in I Cor.3:4-9.

“4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not {mere} men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave {opportunity} to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.”

A. Our attitude toward leadership will reveal something about our spiritual condition.

1. When Paul addresses the subject of “carnality” in Corinth, he looks at the way the church viewed its leaders.
2. As will be evident when we get to chapter 12-14, it is not only followers that need to be challenged. Church leaders in Corinth were also “carnal” and misused their position.

B. This text surfaces four problem attitudes that were present in the early church at Corinth and in our day as well.

1. Exaggerating a leader's strengths.

- a. The Corinthians were naturally attracted to particular teacher's personality, style, gift, etc. just as we are today. There is nothing abnormal or wrong in having preferences in ministry leaders.
- b. But in the case of the Corinthians, it was not just preferences that were evident. They were identifying themselves with the characteristics and emphasis of one leader over against others. Paul, no doubt had strengths that Apollos did not and visa versa. These strengths could easily be elevated to “the key” to edification and even orthodoxy.
- c. By the same token, we can imagine that a particular leader's weaknesses were too often hidden or ignored creating a dangerous environment for both leaders and those they led.
- d. We know this was the case in Corinth by noting the way Paul encourages the church to remember that he and other leaders are “nothing” but “servants.”
- e. Today we must ask ourselves - “Do we put our leaders on a pedestal?” When we do this, we not only reveal our carnality but also bring a toxic element into our Christian community. This attitude, not only hinders the flock, it also can do damage to leaders.

2. Exaggerating a leader's significance.

- a. Note that Paul reminds the Corinthians that it is God that causes the growth and it is God's Spirit working in hearts enabling them to respond so as to grow.

- b. He is not suggesting that leaders don't have a role but that we must not exaggerate their significance.
- c. This is hard for us to receive because we "naturally" experience spiritual edification in the presence of some leaders more than others. We cannot, need not, and should not deny this.
- d. What we must see is that as we grow spiritually (and are no longer carnal babes) we become less dependent on leaders for our edification. Like natural children, we can fend for our selves (in ways that we could not as babes) when we grow up. Paul is trying to wean the Corinthians off the spiritual bottle.
- e. Are we too passive in our relationship with leaders? Are we seeing a particular style, gift, or characteristic of a leader as "a deal maker or breaker" with respect to our spiritual growth?

3. Exaggerating a leader's sufficiency.

- a. Although this text does not emphasize this point, chapters 12-14 will.
- b. When the Corinthians attached themselves carnally to one leader, they were also saying, "We don't need the gifts and ministry of others." Note this passage from I Cor.12

"4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all {persons.} 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another {various} kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. 12 For even as the body is one and {yet} has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not {a part} of the body," it is not for this reason any the less {a part} of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not {a part} of the body," it is not for this reason any the less {a part} of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those {members} of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly {members come to} have more abundant seemliness, 24 whereas our seemly {members} have no need {of it.} But God has {so} composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that {member} which lacked, 25 that there should be no division in the body, but {that} the members should have the

same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if {one} member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, {various} kinds of tongues. ²⁹ All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not {workers of} miracles, are they? ³⁰ All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? ³¹ But earnestly desire the greater gifts.”

- c. One of the characteristics of a mature healthy Christian is “balance”. When we shut ourselves off from parts of the body, which God has ordained to edify us, we are asking for imbalance, division, and arrested spiritual development.
- d. We must ask ourselves if we are suffering from an imbalanced spiritual diet in our strong preferences for one style or kind of ministry?

4. Exaggerating a leader's superiority.

- a. We cannot leave this text without noting the warning Paul gives to followers and leaders to not compete with others in leadership.
- b. Each leader will be judged by God based on his or her unique calling in ministry. There is no room for keeping score or measuring one leader by another's strengths or weaknesses.
- c. In our day it is all too common to compare church's pastors as though they were competing quarterbacks in stiff competition for the noses and nickels of the Christian field.
- d. Leaders are all too often leading the way in such competition. They can compare themselves with others favorably or unfavorably as their carnal souls may demand.

C. The point of this text

*See the “whole picture” with respect to the Body of Christ.
The exaggeration of a leader's strength, significance, sufficiency, and superiority
is destructive to both leaders and those they lead.*

D. But now we must ask ourselves some practical questions about the application of the warnings in this text.

1. Is it OK to prefer one ministry over another?

- a. **Yes.** At various points in our spiritual growth we will need, be drawn to, and prefer, different kinds of ministry gifts, styles, etc.
- b. It is also to be expected that we are going to often have a personality connection with some leaders more than others. This is not a problem so long as we respect the need for different gifts and roles in the church. It is when we assume that our tastes are also God's tastes and should be everyone else's tastes.

2. Is criticism of a ministry always a carnal activity?

- a. **No.** Leaders are not above criticism and they all too often are carnal themselves doing great damage to the church. Note the way Paul often warns against carnal leadership. II Cor.11:3-4; I Tim.1:3-4; 4:1-3; Titus 1:10-11; I Pet.5:2-3; II Pet.2:1-3
- b. The use of the tongue is a very important issue in our relationship to leaders. The commandment forbidding the bearing of false testimony is very important in a healthy community. James 3:1-12 warns us that we can destroy people in vulnerable positions by the undisciplined way we talk to and about them. James warns teachers (3:1-2) to be very careful in how they speak because they will often be in the position of "the stronger brother" who is responsible for protecting "the weaker brother" so that he or she does not stumble or develop a carnal attitude. Rom.14:13-15:6
- c. The protocol for appealing to spiritual authority is important.
 1. Pray - We are to cast our cares on God because He cares for us. I Pet.5:7
 2. Be sure that you're on solid footing in making your appeal.
 - a. Is your appeal just?
 - b. Is your appeal coming from a servant heart?
 - c. Is your appeal sensitive to what God might be doing through injustice?
 3. Be sure that the timing is right.
 4. Be respectful of authority and gracious with both favorable and unfavorable responses.

3. How can I set boundaries in my attitude and toward leaders?

- a. Cultivate a "big picture" perception of the Church and the Kingdom - a perception that sees value in differences that may not be needed by you at the moment. It is not all about you. It is about Christ and those for whom he died.
- b. Become familiar with the Bible's teaching on authority and your response to it. Following is an outlined study that can get you started.

Responding to authority

1. Spheres of human authority.
 - a. **Civil** - Jn.19:11 Jesus addressing Pilate, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above."
 - b. **Commerce** - Col.3:22-23 "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."
 - c. **Church** - Heb.13:11 "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

- d. **Family** - Col.3:18-20 “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”
2. The twofold responsibility of those under human authority.
 - a. **Obedience** - a spirit of submission
 1. I Pet.2:13 “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority. or to governors as sent by him”
 - b. **Appeal** - a need for accountability
 1. I Tim.5:1-2 “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father . . . older women as mothers.”
 2. Col.4:1 “Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”
3. Two positions that those under human authority must avoid.
 - a. **A spirit of resignation** - (blind obedience) - The failure to make a proper appeal to authority and hold authority accountable.
 - b. **A spirit of rebellion** - (selfish pride) - The failure to cultivate a spirit of submission.
4. Attitudes that reflect spiritual maturity.
 - a. A willingness to **forgive**. Eph.4:32 “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
 - b. A willingness to **forebear**. Prov.25:15 “By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone.” Eph.4:2 “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love.”
 - c. A willingness to **compromise**. On issues of fundamentals to the faith we should not compromise but we must decide on what other issues we are willing to stand firm on. In many cases, the unity of the church is more important than having our preferences on every issue.
 - d. A willingness to **yield**. In order for there to be harmony and unity in any organization there must be a willingness to yield to others, usually the majority or the leadership. This does not mean that there is no room for debate or appeal but at some point there must be a willingness to yield.
5. How to appeal to those in authority.
 - a. Deal with the human spirit of **autonomy**.

Rom.12 “¹ I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

 1. All are to submit to the authority of God.
 2. Those who are submitted to God’s authority will respect “God ordained” authority – civil, church, family, etc.
 - b. **Expect God** to use circumstances to develop and demonstrate your character.
 1. The pressure of circumstances can reveal your hidden motives and spiritual strongholds.
 2. Your response to circumstances is the sphere where you have responsibility and control.
 - c. The **prerequisites** to an effective appeal to authority.
 1. We cannot appeal without **love**.

2. We cannot appeal without **humility**. It should be recognized that we all are going to make mistakes of the tongue (Jas.3:1-12) and we each will have areas that are vulnerable to critique.
 3. We cannot appeal without **facts**.
 4. We cannot appeal without **respect**.
 - d. **Talk to God** - Pray - We are to cast our cares on God because He cares for us. I Pet.5:7 “casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.”
 - e. **Talk to those responsible** (not about them behind their back).
 1. As much as possible, when giving a negative report, speak as though the person you are talking about is present.
 2. Do not share negative reports with people who are not a part of the problem or the solution.
 3. Distinguish between facts and feelings in speaking to or about others.
 4. Note that those in positions of leadership are vulnerable and easy targets for misunderstanding and criticism, which has the effect of undermining their ability to perform their duties. For this reason, they need protection and respect above and beyond that of others.
 - f. **Be gracious with both favorable and unfavorable responses.**
 - g. Be sensitive to the right **timing**.
 1. Speaking the **truth in love**. Eph.4:15 “but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects unto Him, who is the head, even Christ.”
 2. Speaking **graciously**. Eph.4:29 “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”
5. How are leaders to respond to those who resist or question their decisions?

I Pet. 5 “¹ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as {your} fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to {the will of} God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*”

- a. Leaders are to take the role and attitude of a **servant**.
- b. Leaders are to recognize that they can easily **abuse** those under their care.
- c. Leaders are to respect the wisdom that can come from **diversity** of perspective.
- d. Leaders communicate love to those under their charge as they work hard to **listen to, understand, and show respect** for those who challenge them.
- e. Leaders must **discern the spirit** of those who resist them.
 1. A rebellious spirit must be disciplined while a Godly spirit is to be respected.
 2. A “weaker” or “younger” believer is to be given more grace and forbearance than a “Pharisee”.