

Can Servants Be Leaders?

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Pastor Dan and Pastor Mark Skit.....

Now, let me assure you that Pastor Mark doesn't think this church should be run like the army. In case you didn't realize it, that was just a skit. Yet, I am afraid that there are pastors and other church leaders who think a military style of leadership is appropriate for the church. There are even quite a few people sitting in church pews who seem to prefer to follow those types of leaders. However, it is not supposed to be that way. Today, as we continue our series on the purpose of the church, on "Why Are We Here?" we are going to explore the type of attitude the Lord wants leaders in our church to have. We will also see how each of us in this congregation should relate to one another. This is important stuff, so let's pause and pray the Lord would enable us to hear as He speaks to us through His Word.

So, what does the Bible say about leaders in a church? First, we see that leaders are to be servants. In Matthew 20:20-28 we have the story where the mother of James and John asks Jesus if her sons can have the places of honor, sitting beside Jesus when He reigns as King. Jesus, in verses 22 and 23, says they misunderstand what His kingdom is about, but in verse 24, it says that other disciples were pretty furious with James and John. **Matthew 20:25-28—Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** Now there are a number of important things taught in these verses, but I want you to note what Jesus says about leadership style. He notes that the Gentiles, the pagan leaders, "lord it over their subjects." They run around giving orders to everyone, but it doesn't work that way in Jesus' kingdom, or in the church. To be great, to be a true leader, one needs to be a servant.

Just as the Lord Jesus was a servant, those who are leaders in the church need to be servants. Just as Jesus washed His disciples' feet, rather than having them wash His feet, Christian leaders are to be the ones who serve, not the ones who are served.

The theme of church leaders being servants is picked up by the Apostle Peter. In 1 Peter 5, we see instructions that the apostle is giving to elders in the church. In our congregation, that would probably include pastors and deacons. **1 Peter 5:2-3 — Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.** Oh, indeed, that is a very different leadership style than you see in a lot of places, including some churches, but this is what the Lord expects in the church. A leader should not be trying to figure how the people around him can be used to make his life more comfortable, but rather he should be trying to figure out how he can make their lives better. A leader should not be trying to order other folks around, but rather she should be seeking to lead by example.

Next, I want to look at an example of servant leadership, the Apostle Paul. As we read the New Testament, it is clear that Paul is a very strong leader, but he is also a servant leader. For example, let's look at what Paul says to his friend Philemon concerning a man named Onesimus, a slave who had escaped from Philemon's household, but now had become a Christian. Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon, though he would prefer to just keep this fellow with him to help with the ministry. Now listen to what he says in **Philemon 14 — But I didn't want to do anything without your consent, so that your good deed might not be out of obligation, but of your own free will.** Did you catch that? Paul is not going to give Philemon orders. Yes, Paul was the great apostle of the church. But he basically said, "My friend, this has to be your call. I'm not going to coerce you into doing what I think you should do. You need to do what you think is right." Paul didn't lord it over

other Christians.

This style of leadership is also evident in Paul's attitude about money, which we see in the letter we call 2 Corinthians. In chapters 8 and 9, he is taking an offering from the Greek churches to share with the Christians in Jerusalem. However, he didn't command the people to give. He didn't say, "Private, write me a check for \$500 on the double." Yes, he encourages them to be generous, but says **2 Corinthians 9:7—Each person should give as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver.** In other words, Paul tells them, "How much you give, or if you give at all, is up to you. I cannot make that decision for you." Then, in chapters 11 and 12, Paul talks about how he has served the Christians in Corinth without any desire for financial gain. He used money others had given him so that he would not in any way be a burden to the Corinthians. This is what he says in **2 Corinthians 12:14-15a—Look, I am ready to come to you this third time. I will not burden you, since I am not seeking what is yours, but you. For children ought not save up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be spent for you.** Paul understood that as an apostle he had the right to demand that the people in the church give money to him. But he also knew that it is the pagan rulers who lord it over others and give orders all of the time and seek to get from others whatever they can. As a follower of Jesus who wanted to be a good leader, who wanted true greatness in Jesus' kingdom, he had to be a servant.

Finally, we need to look at the other side of the coin. Though leaders in the church are there to serve others, the Bible says church members are to respect and submit to their leaders. **Hebrews 13:17—Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.** In 1 Timothy 5:17 we read: **The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.** Double honor means that a church should respect and pay money to at least some of its leaders. "But Pastor Dan, I am getting confused. First, you said the leaders of the church

should be servants, and now you are saying they need to be respected, obeyed and even paid. Which is it?" Well, both. I don't think there is a contradiction here. Church leaders are to have a servant attitude where they are willing to give to those to whom they minister without ever expecting anything in return. The people in the church, however, are to treat those servant leaders—pastors, deacons, etc.—with great respect. In fact, the two kind of feed each other. The more that a servant attitude is evident in a leader, the more that individual gives of himself, the more the people in the church need to make sure they are honoring that leader.

OK, this is my summary of what I see as the biblical teaching about leaders being servants. There are plenty of other texts we could have looked at, but I think these paint a pretty clear picture. So how does what the Bible teaches apply today, especially at CBC?

First, it should disturb us whenever church leaders don't want to be servants. Now, in all honesty, I am not thinking about anyone in this congregation. Yet, as I talk to different pastors and lay leaders, I sometimes don't sense a servant attitude. This seems especially true in churches which are structured like ours.

Folks, there are basically three different types of church government:

- 1) An Episcopalian structure has a clearly defined hierarchy, with bishops, archbishops, etc. The Roman Catholic Church is the most obvious example of this type of government.
- 2) A Presbyterian form of government essentially relies on clergy and elected lay representatives to make decisions for the congregation. This is used, guess what, in Presbyterian and other Reformed Churches.
- 3) We have the Congregational form of government. The ultimate decision-making authority is the members of each congregation. This is used in Baptist Churches and in many other groups as well. This is the type of governing structure we have at CBC. A majority vote by the members of the congregation at a business meeting can overrule any decision made by the pastor or the church board.

Now, I would suspect that non-servant attitudes would be most common in an Episcopalian type structure. The clear chain of command provides a temptation for leaders to abuse their power as they give orders to subordinates. That has certainly happened throughout church history, and I am sure it happens sometimes today. Yet, what I find disturbing is that some of the most authoritarian leaders are found in churches which have, at least in theory, a Congregational type of structure. I have talked to Baptist pastors who proudly claim, "People in my church will do whatever I tell them to do." Or they express great frustration because people in their church refuse to do what they are told to do. Other times, I have heard a pastor say, "My church better give me this much money," or "They better not expect me to work extra hours." Is that a servant attitude? And then I have people tell me, "I go to Pastor Joe Smith's church," or "I am a member of Rev. Tom Johnson's church." I think, I don't say, but I think, "Excuse me. Your church doesn't belong to your pastor! What type of leadership is he providing that makes people think of it as his church?" It concerns me that many so-called "church experts" claim the key to numerical growth in a church is "strong pastoral leadership." They say that having lay people, folks like you, take leadership in ministry looks good in theory, but in reality it is the pastor-centered church which will be the most successful. Now, friends, a servant leader can still be a strong leader. The Apostle Paul is an example of that. Yet, I am afraid a pastor whose goal is to be a strong leader will seldom be a servant. Though a pastor-centered church may attract a lot of people, that is not the type of church the Bible says we are to be. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Lord makes it clear that a church's ministry should not be about just one person or a few individuals doing the work. All the people in a church should be using their gifts and abilities to serve others and glorify God. It is dangerous when pastors and/or people in the congregation ignore the Bible's teaching that leaders in the church are to be servants.

Second, churches need to make decisions in the right way. What missionaries should be supported with the money the church receives? What color should the church doors be painted? Who should teach the third grade Sunday School class? What version of the Bible

should be in the pew racks? Every church makes a lot of decisions. How do these decisions get made? Well, as I said, there are some churches with a very structured hierarchy where most decisions are made from the top down. At CBC it might be easier if I, as the senior pastor, just decided: We will give \$5000 to this missionary, the doors will be painted green (and gold), Brenda will teach the third grade Sunday School class, and we will buy new CSB Bibles for the racks. Decisions would be made more quickly, but I don't think that would be right. As the senior pastor, I am not supposed to be the general. It is not my job to give people orders. I am to be a servant leader. When it comes to making decisions, I should provide leadership, but often these are choices we need to make together. Yes, as a pastor I make decisions for the church frequently, but I am always accountable to the church board, and ultimately to you as the congregation. If you don't think some of the decisions I am making are good ones, then as a congregation, we need to sit down and figure out how to best honor the Lord.

Some of you may be thinking, "Pastor Dan, that all sounds good in theory, but if I disagree with a decision you make, you will still get your way. No one will listen to me." Not necessarily. Back in 1999—ancient history, I proposed that we change the name of this church from First Baptist Church to Chisholm Baptist Church. The church board agreed with that. But when the congregation met, you voted it down. And that was OK. Yes, a few years later the name was changed to Chisholm Baptist Church, but that was not my decision. It was a decision we as a church made together. Friends, though I want you to respect me as your leader, I also think it is important that you feel free to disagree with me. Many times I have gone to a church board meeting thinking this is what we should do, but after we discussed the issue and I heard the opinions of other leaders in the church, I realized, "No, the Lord probably doesn't want us to do that. At least not right now." And remember, our church board meetings are open to anyone in the congregation who wants to attend. If you want to discuss an issue with the board, talk to Kraig Stolhammer about being put on the agenda. At CBC, our desire is that corporate decisions be made in an atmosphere of love, that we would always strive to

reach a consensus which is consistent with what the Bible teaches, and that whatever we do would be honoring to the Lord. We always need to remember that Jesus Christ is the head of the church, including CBC. As we said last week, what He wants this church to do is what matters most. As a pastor, I should not be trying to get the church to do what I want it to do, but encourage us to do what the Lord Jesus has called us to do. As a congregation, your goal should not be to make the church into something with which you feel comfortable, but rather you should desire to see the church be one that honors the Lord in every way. CBC needs to make decisions the right way and with the right motives.

Third, everyone in this church should have a desire to serve. One of the marks of true servant leaders is that we lead others to serve. When people in the congregation see pastors and other leaders not getting what they can for themselves, but seeking to honor the Lord and serve others, then those people start to make that their priority as well. A servant attitude can be contagious, and it is a much better thing to share than the stomach flu. One of the strengths of this church, one of the reasons for the unity we enjoy, is that there are many men and women who are leaders in this church and are also true servants. They are willing to give their time, energy and money to help other people. If someone needs a ride somewhere, if someone needs help fixing a garage door, or if someone needs \$100 to get a car repaired, I am confident that I could contact almost any one of our leaders and he/she would say, "Yes, I would be glad to help." And because this attitude is contagious, there has gotten to be a long list of people in this congregation who I know are willing to help when there is a need. That is the way it is supposed to be in the church of Jesus Christ.

When people out there look at CBC, two things should strike them. First should be our commitment to honoring the Lord. Our loyalty to Him should shine like a neon light on the darkest night. The second thing they should be struck by is how people here are willing to serve each other. As **John 13:35** says— **This is how all men will know you are my disciples, by your love one for another.** This church proclaims the Great News, the Gospel as we tell people about who Jesus is and what He has done for us through His

life, death and resurrection. And then by our actions, we show people how our lives have been impacted by that Gospel.

Friends, do you want to be great in God's Kingdom? Do you want to find real joy in life? If so, you need to learn to serve other people. If you are a leader in the church or in the community, at work or even in your home, then it is important that you learn to serve because the best leaders are servant leaders. When you are part of a church that is choosing leaders, you want to make sure you choose leaders who are willing to serve. Yes, you want competent leaders. You may be attracted to charismatic leaders, but more than anything you should want godly, servant leaders. And friends, once you have those leaders, pray for them. Pray that the Lord would continue to fill their hearts with a desire to serve others, by God's grace and for His glory!