

Faithful Leaders:
Scripture Faithfulness as the Central Distinctive of a
Christian Theology of Leadership and Philosophy of Ministry.

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The topic of leadership has been an interest-growing subject in the last three decades.¹ This is true not only in the business world but also among Christians. However, we need to be careful on how to approach this interesting subject. For, even though we recognize that there could be some wisdom found in general Theories of Leadership, we do not want to be fully identified with a non-biblical perspective of leadership which most of the times stands at odds with Scripture, as it aims to pursue an outcome characterized by personal power and greatness.² So, in the one hand, we want to distinguish ourselves from *business-world leadership*; whereas, in the other, as Huizing comments: “Christianity, at its deepest essence, is a practice of followership.”³ Thus, *leadership* is an essential term to understand how Christianity functions. Sadly, some of the business leadership principles which do not derive from Scripture have found their way into the church. Therefore, an objective standard besides the adjective “*Christian*” is needed to define and identify real Scriptural Leadership.

Hence, the purpose of this paper is to observe how the concept of Scripture Faithfulness is the pivotal distinctive that shapes all other aspects of true Christian Leadership.

What is it meant by Christian Leadership?

The answer to this question may differ depending on the author; also, most of them won’t give us a straightforward definition of *Christian Leadership* as they will do with the concept of *Christian Leader*. Therefore, let us analyze which the main components of these definitions are to then subtract from there what Christian Leadership is.

¹ R. Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House, 2012), 15.

² Russell L. Huizing, “Bringing Christ to the Table of Leadership: Moving Towards a Theology of Leadership,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 5, no. 2 (2011): 64.

³ *Ibid.*, 58.

Clinton explains that, in a biblical context, a leader is that person with a God-given capacity and responsibility to influence a specific group of God's people toward his purposes for the group.⁴ J. Oswald Sanders gives various definitions of leadership which include the concepts of influencing others⁵ as well as the ability of recognizing the abilities and limitations of others, combined with the capacity to fit each one into the job where he will do his best.⁶ In Ford we can read echoes of this concept of influencing others by his use of the term "moving others;"⁷ while Mohler seems to hold the idea that leadership ought to evoke certain *conviction*,⁸ which conveys the idea of purpose, or, what we would call in leadership language, a *vision*.

Thus, it seems a suitable definition of a Christian Leader this: "He who called by God, is given God's vision for a group of people, and enabled by God, helps them fulfil it."⁹ Therefore, Christian Leadership would be nothing else than the reality of God calling specific people, which we will call leaders, giving them a specific vision for a specific group of his people, and enabling these leaders to help this people fulfil the given vision. Now, what is most important from this definition is that is a theocentric, rather than an anthropocentric description of what a leader ought to be and do. By centering our attention in God's purposes for his people, as well as God's empowerment of His chosen leaders, it is He who becomes the prime actor on scene, while the leaders are to be understood as joyful instruments of God's will.

⁴ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, Rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 253.

⁵ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, Commitment to spiritual growth series (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷ Leighton Ford, *Transforming Leadership: Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values & Empowering Change* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 25.

⁸ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 24.

⁹ Thomas D. Hawkes, "Class 1, Introduction: Leadership Concepts and Biblical Leadership" (presented at the Church Planting Leadership PT740 Lectures., Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC., February 4, 2019), 14.

Theology of Leadership

This theocentric concept is far from being new to Christian theology. In fact, it derives directly from the pages of Scripture. As Huizing argues, the requirement of a Christ-centric, God-governed leadership returns to the final command of Jesus—make followers of Jesus who are taught to live as He lived. Since Jesus Himself came not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45), it is the same for His followers. It is perhaps here that a clear distinction can be made between general leadership theories and a theological leadership.¹⁰

God is always central in every aspect of human life and leadership must not be excluded. Hence, if we want to be faithful to Scripture in what it has to say about this subject, we need to do so by first understanding that God elects and calls people to lead,¹¹ gives them both general¹² and specific¹³ vision of how the ministry they are called to do looks like, and enables them¹⁴ to fulfil that ministry. Paul clearly understood these truths; thus, he writes:

*For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But **by the grace of God** I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, **though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.** (1 Cor. 15:9-10 emphasis added).*

Values

To further develop a theology of Leadership, let us now turn to what the Scriptures say about what should be most precious for a leader. I am speaking now about its values in leadership. I do understand that one could go in many directions from here, as the Bible clearly brings forth more than one only treasure which will be desirable for leadership and ministry. Yet, I am convinced that it all

¹⁰ Huizing, “Bringing Christ to the Table of Leadership,” 64.

¹¹ Jn. 15:16; Ge. 12:1 (Abraham’s calling); Ex. 3:10 (Moses’ calling); Matt. 4:18 (Peter’s calling); Acts 9:1-18 (Paul’s calling).

¹² Matt. 28:18-20.

¹³ Lk. 10:1-12.

¹⁴ Acts 1:8.

may come to the concept of *faithfulness*. My election may appear arbitrary to some, however, there is a sense in which values reflect the personality of the leader as they are meant to be those beliefs to which he deeply holds,¹⁵ and another in which, in the case of Christian leadership, core values ought to reflect what God commands from his chosen agents of leadership. Besides, and to go in line with our Reformed tradition, it must be commented that Calvin also regarded faithfulness as a *sine qua non* of pastoral ministry.¹⁶ Hence, let us analyze some evidence for faithfulness as being a good value to hold as a standard for a Christian leader.

The Dictionary of Bible Themes accurately defines faithfulness as the proper response to God by his covenant people; seen in a steadfast commitment which reflects God's own faithfulness to the covenant. Encouraged in all believers, it is especially important in leaders.¹⁷ Put in more simple words, faithfulness is the God-given ability, received by covenant grace, to remain submissive to God's authority under any circumstance. And surely, if we are to speak about God's authority, we need to do so by understanding authority as the revealed Word of God.

The first evidence is that Jesus himself remained faithful to the Word of God. And, since we can take Jesus as our primary model of Biblical Leadership,¹⁸ it is proper to seek to imitate this attitude which he is constantly depicting. Three special episodes are worthy to be mentioned in this regard. The first being his temptation in the wilderness. Biblical narrative tells us that Jesus was led by the Spirit to the dessert to be tempted by Satan. There, in three occasions Satan attempts to tempt Jesus, and each time Jesus responds with Scripture.¹⁹ This is worthy to notice because Jesus doesn't respond in a way in which human beings (and leaders) cannot identify with. He does not display his almighty

¹⁵ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, 5th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 45–54.

¹⁶ Thomas D. Hawkes, *Pious Pastors: Calvin's Theology of Sanctification and the Genevan Academy* (Authentic Media, 2016), 120–121.

¹⁷ Martin H. Manser, ed., "Faithfulness," *Zondervan Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999).

¹⁸ Ford, *Transforming Leadership*, 30–33.

¹⁹ Matt. 4:1-11.

power to silence the devil. Rather, he remains faithful to what he had learned of Scripture.²⁰ As Fernando comments, “in this we see the high priority that Scriptures had in the life and ministry of Jesus.”²¹ The second passage is the rebuke to the Pharisees found in the Sermon on the Mount. While these religious men are accusing him of breaking the law, Jesus reaffirms his faithfulness to the Word by stating that he has indeed come to fulfill the law, and that this law will remain until the end of the age.²² Thirdly, the quotation from the cross. While Jesus hangs from the tree, in the moment of worst suffering, probably the most painful experience through which he had to go, again, rather than neglecting the Word, he quotes a Psalm from David.²³ Lastly, the Emmaus Road Exposition. After his resurrection, we see Jesus not revealing himself directly to the disciples, but revealing himself from and through Scripture,²⁴ which portrays the great faithfulness and commitment that Jesus had for Scripture.

In this way, faithfulness to the Word as authority is not only a hallmark of Christian leader, but it actually helps us remain true to God, and love God through the difficult times of ministry, as it strengthens us and gives us security in its truths.²⁵ Clinton also marks up this important features in a leader as he discusses what he calls the integrity, the obedience, and the word checks in the early development of Christian leaders.²⁶

Characteristics of a Christian Leader

By upholding this standard of faithfulness God both requires and produces certain characteristics in the leader. He requires these features in the sense that these are real conditions for faithfulness to be kept. As we will see, the Christian leader cannot remain faithful without being

²⁰ Lk. 2:52; Hb. 5:8.

²¹ Ajith Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2002), 89.

²² Matt. 5:17-20

²³ Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:1.

²⁴ Lk. 24:13-34.

²⁵ Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry*, 93.

²⁶ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 50–63.

humble, wise, loving or bold. Nevertheless, and at the same time, there is a real sense in which it is God who produces and is the source of these characteristics in the life of the Christian Leader which he needs to remain faithful, and the way in which he produces these is mainly by faithfulness to his Word. Here again lays a mystery. For, in one way, it is God who grants us the characteristics and ability to remain faithful, while, in another, we are completely responsible to work out our faithfulness.

The first of these characteristics is *humbleness*. It suffices to gaze towards this twofold mysterious dynamic in which we need God's mighty hand to remain faithful and yet, it is at the same time our responsibility to do so, to realize how dependent we are upon our God. This, far from drifting us away from him makes us come nearer in supplication asking him to enable us to do his work. As Seamands notes by quoting from John Stott, this work is not even ours, but Christ's. We are only instruments to carry on his ongoing ministry.²⁷ He also comments that our dependence goes even further, since ministry, as every other work of God, is a trinitarian work. We depend, thus, upon the Holy Spirit, to help us discern the will of the Father, as revealed throughout Scripture, to continue Jesus' ministry for his glory.²⁸

This high sense of dependence is intent to humble the leader up until the point that he cannot boast in himself at all, as he recognizes that any advance on the work of the kingdom is given by God. At the same time, God has also revealed in his Word that he hates pride and that he resists the proud.²⁹ This utter resistance to pride is based both in the reality that God is righteously jealous of his glory, and that Jesus humbled himself³⁰ and came to serve and not to be served. Thus, this servant-leader characteristic is in fact one which derives from a humbled heart, which remains faithful to Scripture.

²⁷ Stephen A. Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 20–30.

²⁹ Lk. 1:51-52.

³⁰ Phlp. 2:1-11.

Wisdom will be the second characteristic to be discussed. This is obtained both by meditating in the Word of God, and constantly asking the aid of the Spirit to discern which specific turn shall we take as leaders in specific circumstances. Also, the difference which Seamands notes between doing something for God and doing what God tells us to do³¹ is worthy to be noted. Discerning this difference will require wisdom, which James assures us that comes only from God.³²

Another characteristic to be found in a Christian leader is that of love. The Christian leader shall show love for God, for his Word, for his people, for his work. Otherwise, he will not remain faithful to Scripture. This concept derives directly from the understanding of sonship in our union with Christ. This is, as God has fatherly loved us in Christ, so we, as leaders, are to love the flock. Ford, speaking about this, argues that leadership in fact is not something that someone does, but rather, something that someone is.³³ This idea comes before the analysis of how the Father's affirmation of Jesus at his baptism, by the phrase: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," displays the fatherly love from God the Father to God the Son, which hallmarks the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and how leaders are to do the same with those whom they lead. This idea of love as crucial for ministry was something Calvin not only cherished in his Genevan Academy, but that he required of those who went to study under him.³⁴ Also, this love will be particularly helpful as we engage in Situational Leadership, which requires the leader to self-deny his ways and necessities to seek for those needs and ways that best suit those who he lead.

Finally, the last of our characteristics discussed will be boldness. This boldness is necessary to remain faithful when uncomfortable circumstances arise such as having to preach on a controversial topic or having to apply church discipline. This boldness, grounded in all humility, wisdom, and love, will make us depart from the idea of neglecting the Word of God when such a difficult task comes

³¹ Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God*, 26.

³² Jm. 3:13-18.

³³ Ford, *Transforming Leadership*, 38.

³⁴ Hawkes, *Pious Pastors*, 129-130.

before us. Sanders speaks to this feature as courage, which is needed to encounter difficulty firmly and without fear.³⁵

Competencies and Practices

Competencies and practices for Christian leadership go hand to hand. *Competencies* are those abilities required for Christian Leadership whereas *practices* are the specific ways in which leaders should display those competencies. Thus, we may talk of a limited quantity of competencies while speaking of an infinity of practices for each. Therefore, in the following lines, I will only give what I believe biblical competencies are, and one practice for each.

Biblical competencies for Christian Leadership, and specifically for pastoral ministry may be found both in 1 Timothy and Titus. However, one can not just throw away these passages without some analysis, insofar not every qualification speaks of an ability *per se*. There are some qualifications like “self-controlled”, or “husband of one wife”, which speak more about character than about a competency. Then, we will talk as competencies only of those qualifications such as “able to teach”, “hospitable”, and “not being a recent convert”.

The leader must be able to teach. This means that he must be able to communicate with clarity ideas which derive from Scripture. Mohler argues that this is the most essential skill for leadership.³⁶ This ability of communication though is not natural in everyone; God may give it to those whom he wants to be leading his people. A good practice to test this competency is writing about different topics of the Christian faith, as this allows us to review time and again certain message before it is delivered. Also, by continuing to do it, we might seem a progress in both our written and oral communication abilities. Mohler again has a whole chapter on this practice in his leadership book.³⁷

³⁵ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 59.

³⁶ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 91–97.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 167–173.

The leader should be hospitable. The English word itself speaks of an ability. Hospitality is a competency ought to be found in every Christian leader. Again, how should it be practiced may vary from leader to leader depending on the different circumstances in which each leader is. Hospitality itself is the ability to treat others, specially foreigners with kindness and love. The word in Greek carries this meaning in itself: φιλόξενος (*philoxenos*) is *descriptive of practical kindness paid especially to strangers, often in the sharing of food and drink, lodging, and provision.*³⁸ Then, a constant practice one can do regarding this competency is treat strangers with kindness, helping with whatever is in one's capacities. This may vary from sharing food with someone in need up unto housing some Christian brother for a limited time. Every time we show love to our neighbor as Jesus commanded us to do, we not only practice hospitality, but we also remain faithful to the Word.

Not being a recent convert may not be a competency in and of itself. Nevertheless, by way of contrast, we can know something positive about a Christian leader. This is that Christian Leader competency entails time and maturing. Clinton also speaks of this rather lengthily in his book. He demonstrates how leadership stages usually are found within life-stages. These stages he names as Sovereign Foundations, Inner-Life Growth, Ministry Maturing, Life Maturing, Convergence and Afterglow.³⁹ There's not a specific practice for all of these, rather, practices will vary depending on which stage we're found. Therefore, let me only comment, as an example, of the stage in which the author is: Inner-Life Growth. Due to that fact that the previously mentioned integrity, obedience, and word check are to be learned in this stage,⁴⁰ there are two practices that someone experiencing this stage can be doing. First, submitting to authority. Looking for authority to watch over the developing leader in this life-stage will help him understand, appreciate and learn obedience which will be a long-lasting skill for ministry and leadership. Along with this, specific practices of sanctification. The

³⁸ Garwood P. Anderson, "Hospitality," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

³⁹ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 33–46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 62–63.

constant reading of the Word of God, devotion and prayer time, and even the Puritan practice of *meditation*, which involves biblical reflection, detachment from sin, and attachment to God and one's neighbor,⁴¹ will help the leader focus in his overall faithfulness.

Conclusion, towards a Philosophy of Ministry Grounded in Scripture Faithfulness

As we may be able to see, when it comes to Christian Leadership, the question is simple, yet profound: Are we being faithful to what the Scripture teaches?

It is my belief that the way in which we answer this question will determine whether we are being successful in leading as God wants us to lead or not. Hence, let me portray a short example of a Philosophy of Ministry which is grounded in Scripture Faithfulness.

Philosophy of Ministry

Mission

Our mission, in obedience to Christ, is to make disciples that worship God as he commands to be worship, disciple the church with healthy relationships, and witness to the world by being salt and light.

Vision

Our vision is to be a resource church, constantly training leaders in how to lead faithfully, multiplying faithful disciples of Christ, and faithfully witnessing to the world the truth of the Kingdom.

Values

Commitment to the authority of all the infallible, inerrant, and sufficient Word of God.

Love for others as that love which the Father has shown us in Christ.

Zeal for learning continually from the Scriptures.

⁴¹ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 889–895.

Strategy

1. **Engage in Faithful Worship.** This faithful worship will be committed to the exposition of the full counsel of God, the correct administration of the sacraments, and the correct application of church discipline.
2. **Develop Faithful Leaders.** Create a leadership program that aims to inform the mind as well as nurture the heart of faithful disciples, for them to commit to the authority of Scripture, and appreciate faithfulness to the Word of God as the basis for Christian Leadership.
3. **Develop Faithful Disciples.** Create a discipleship program that aims to continually teach believers the truths contained in Scripture, from the most basic to the highest, with a sense of reverence, and a special emphasis in faithfulness, for them to seek further commitment in church as faithful leaders, as well as to develop in them a keen desire to witness to others.
4. **Develop Faithful Witnesses.** Give disciples tools and encouragement sufficient to go out from Monday to Saturday to share and show how Christian faithfulness is to be lived in the world, this includes sharing the gospel with others for them to become disciples as well.

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